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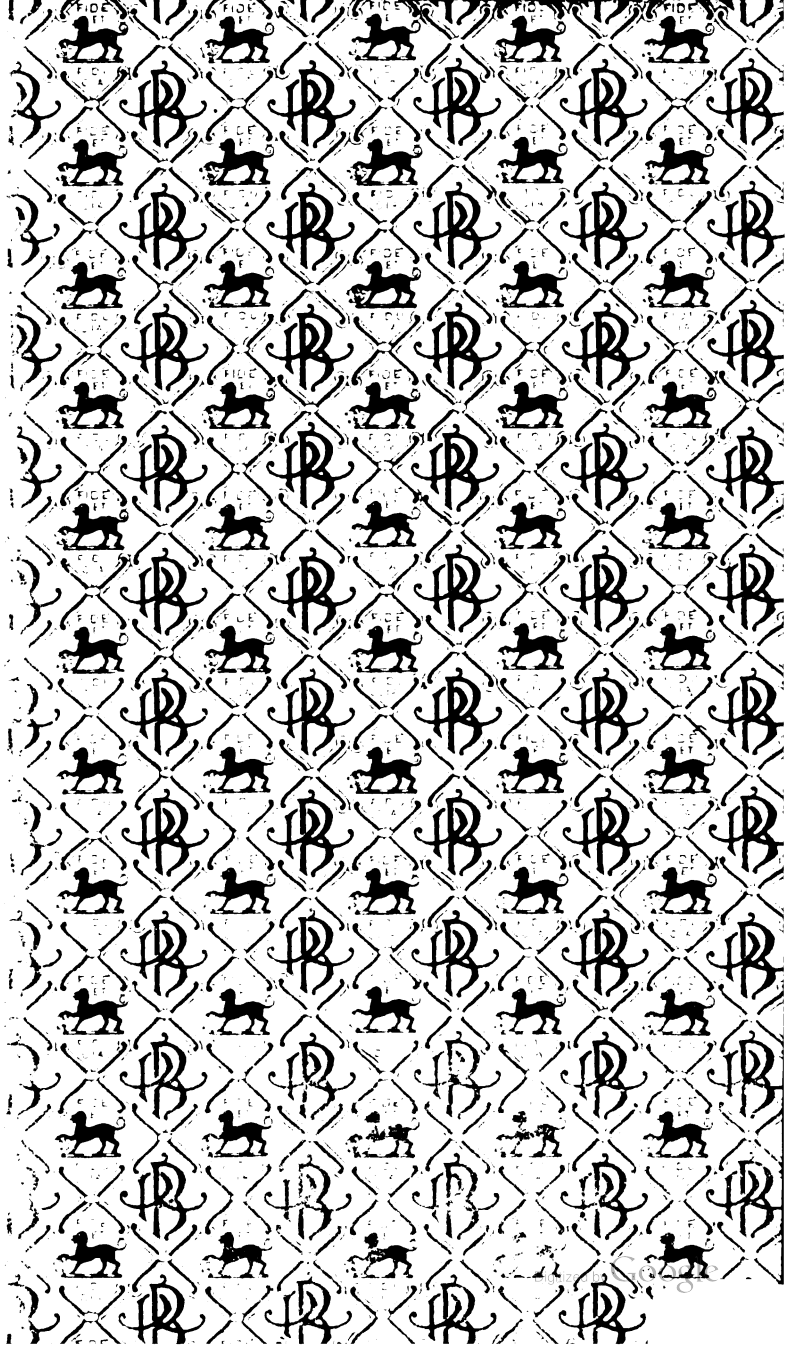


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TALES OF THE NORTH RIDING

TALES OF THE NORTH RIDING

BY

MARY LINSKILL

AUTHOR OF

'BETWEEN THE HEATHER AND THE NORTHERN SEA,' 'THE HAVEN UNDER
THE HILL,' 'IN EXCHANGE FOR A SOUL,' 'CLEVEDEN,' ETC.

'For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity.'

WORDSWORTH



A NEW EDITION

LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen

1893

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Dedicated to

M. A. H.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE PAST:

ROUND THE MEMORY OF WHICH THE SUNLIGHT OF LOVE

STILL LINGERS TENDERLY—IF SADLY.

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CORNBOROUGH VICARAGE

PART I.

'I confess it is a great misery to *have been* happy, the quint-essence of infelicity.'—BURTON'S *Anatomy of Melancholy*.



CHAPTER I.

THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER.

THE little market-town of Cornborough stands just outside the north-eastern portion of the Yorkshire Dale-district. It is, in fact, only separated from Wansdale by Kilham woods and beck, and the long line of moorland hills from which the latter runs. Glorious hills they are, sometimes jutting out in bold rugged peaks, sharp and clear against the sky; then rounding off into brown and purple folds, clad with dark fir-trees; and then stretching away in long undulating lines, till they are lost in the blue-gray haze of the distance. One could never weary of the hills which form the picturesque background of Cornborough.

The town itself—differing but little from any other country market-town—will soon be described. It has its long main street, called Priorsgate—tradition holding that a priory once stood upon the site now occupied by the church; three or four good hotels, which still retain an unmistakable air of ‘the good old coaching days’; a large open market place; and perhaps half a dozen good old-fashioned dwelling-houses. These are the main features of the upper portion of the town.

The lower part of Priorsgate, consisting of a few straggling cottages, built of rough graystone, and thatched with ling—I suppose I ought to call it heather—originally constituted the whole of the village, for in those days it made no pretension to be considered a town, and was called by another name.

Lower down still, where the street becomes a road, with trees, fields, and hedges on either side, as fresh and green as if there was no such thing as town or village in existence, stands the church, and close to it the Vicarage; but the latter is so screened by the foliage of the tall elm and beech trees which surround it, and by the high stone wall which skirts the road, as to be quite invisible to passers-by. On this side of the church, sloping backward quite down to the edge of Kilham beck, are the Vicarage gardens. The

ground immediately on the other side is occupied by the churchyard, which is only divided from the lawn at the back of the house by a narrow gravel path.

At the time of which I write—date quite recent—the whole of this ecclesiastical estate of Cornborough was in a most dilapidated condition. The church itself, an unsightly compound of Norman and Early English architecture, with a square battlemented tower and common casement windows, owed whatever outward attractions it possessed to the ivy which covered it. The chief characteristics of the interior—dirt and damp, high pews and white-washed walls, and the three-storied piece of carpentry known as clerk's desk, reading-desk, and pulpit—are not so uncommon as to need minute description.

The Vicarage was a long, low, old-fashioned house, built of graystone, and roofed with thin flags of the same. It had a dolesome, sombre look about it, which was partly owing to the depth of shade in which it was buried by the trees—some of which grew so near the house that their heavy branches drooped upon the moss-grown roof; and partly to the fact that for many years not even the most necessary repairs had been made. Inside the house things were not so bad; the rooms were dark, the furniture heavy

and old-fashioned, but there was a homelike, comfortable air over everything that compensated for a good deal.

The study was one of the most cheery rooms in the house, and in it the Rev. Robert Dunning, Vicar of Cornborough, spent most of his time. He was an old man and stricken with paralysis; and for five long weary years he had never passed the boundaries of his own little domain. He was not now so powerless as he had been, and during the past summer he had been drawn up and down the garden walks in a Bath-chair; but this taste of the outdoor life, which had been so much to him, was quite as full of pain as of pleasure.

Fortunately, the attack of paralysis which had deprived Mr. Dunning of the power to walk, or even stand alone, had not impaired the strength of his mind or character. Indeed, I think certain angles of the latter had been rather developed than otherwise by the suffering and self-chosen solitude through which he had passed; but he had always had the reputation of being a man of strong will, unequal mood, and reserved, unsocial nature.

In appearance he was much altered. His features, always stern and grave, had acquired a stricken, rigid aspect; his hair was now nearly white; and his large, keen gray eyes had a hollow, sunken look that was

painful to see; but the old signs of intellectual power were as observable as ever.

Mr. Dunning had been twice married, but the death of his second wife, about a month before the time of which I am about to write, had left him again a widower. He was not, however, alone. His daughter, Mrs. Wynburn, who had come to the Vicarage a few weeks before the death of her stepmother, had remained there; Mr. Dunning having, after some hesitation, consented that she should again look upon the Vicarage as her home.

'You know, father, you could not live alone,' she had said, 'with no one but James and Susan to look after you.'

'Yes, Mary, I could, quite well.'

'But you would rather I should stay with you, would you not?'

'I have decided that you should do so. I think it will be better both on your own account and your daughter's.'

'Then Sophie may come home now?' she inquired rather anxiously.

'I have written to say that I wish her to come.'

Mrs. Wynburn's half-audible 'Thank you' expressed little of the gratitude she felt; but she understood her father's mood too well to venture to express it more warmly.

After remaining silent a few moments she spoke again :

‘I should like to go to Brenfield for Sophie myself, father, if I may.’

‘Excuse me, Mary ; in all such minor matters as that you must judge for and rely upon yourself. You are old enough to do so, and you have been accustomed to do it. I have said that I intend Sophia to come here. Any little arrangements connected with her coming must be made between you. Will you ring the bell for prayers?’

After prayers Mrs. Wynburn, knowing her father would wish to be alone, left the study and returned to the dining-room. The fire was still bright, and, having relit the lamp, she sat down in a low chair with her knitting. Sometimes, when her brain was busy, her fingers would fly the faster ; but it was not so to-night. Her work was soon lying unheeded on the skirt of her heavy black dress, and her face had a wondering, changeful expression—as if the effort to connect the Present with the Past or the Future was perplexing.

Mrs. Wynburn was a widow. She had been married to the Rev. Louis Wynburn, Rector of Clayburn-by-the-Sea, when she was only eighteen. Her brief married life had been an unusually happy one—happy beyond any power of mine to describe ; but

the sudden loss of her husband a few months before the birth of her child had darkened and saddened her whole after-life—crushing out her youth, and every feeling of hope and happiness that belongs to youth. She was quiet in her sorrow, and patient; but the thoughts of her heart were never far from the churchyard by the sea where her husband rested.

Unfortunately, the living of Clayburn (a small fishing-village, some five miles distant from Cornborough) was a very small one, and Mr. Wynburn had not possessed any private means, so that his wife and child were left in a most dependent position. This was more to be regretted as the Vicar of Cornborough was by no means a wealthy man, and his own failing health, rendering the assistance of a curate necessary, made it impossible for him to offer his daughter the aid he would probably otherwise have done.

It was these circumstances which made it necessary for Mrs. Wynburn to leave her home—to leave her own little Sophie to the care of Mrs. Dunning, and go out herself to educate the children of strangers. It was a bitter trial. The most painful part of it was, of course, her separation from her child, leaving it at an age when children are dearest and most interesting—needing more than ever a mother's loving care, and showing, by a thousand endearing little words and

ways, that they are beginning to appreciate it; and leaving it in the hands of one in whom, to speak charitably, it was impossible that she could have any confidence whatever. Fortunately, I shall have no need to describe Mrs. Dunning's character—her want of principle, her designing selfishness; but allusion to it was necessary to give an adequate idea of Mrs. Wynburn's feelings when she left home.

Over the events of her governess-life I will pass briefly. The years seemed long and weary to her; a detailed account of them could scarcely fail to be equally wearying to the reader. It will seem strange to say that her holidays, spent at Cornborough Vicarage, were, generally speaking, the most painful parts of this period of her life; but it was so. Her child grew up apart from her, and estranged from her, not only by separation, but by untoward influence, and every year affording fresh proofs of this brought fresh sorrow to Mrs. Wynburn's heart.

Shortly after Mr. Dunning was seized with the attack of paralysis which I have mentioned, he desired Mrs. Wynburn, who was then at home, to make some arrangements for sending Sophie to school. With this request she complied very readily. She had intended to suggest some change herself before she returned to Edinburgh, for her daughter, who was turned eleven years of age, was able to profit

by far less limited advantages than those afforded by the one respectable day-school of Cornborough; besides, there were other reasons for wishing it.

So Sophie was sent to school to Brenfield House, near Derby, and Mrs. Wynburn went back to her governess-life for five more weary years, the monotony of which was only broken by one brief disappointing visit to Cornborough — disappointing because Sophie, who was also at home for her holiday, was still the same Sophie of two years ago; and Mrs. Wynburn saw more plainly than ever that the character of her child — her bright, beautiful child, to whom the whole passionate strength of her nature went out in mother-love — had been moulded, by training and influence, into most unnatural form. It had been done in her earlier, more impressible days. Could it ever be undone? Would the girl who had been taught to believe that impenetrable reserve and unfailing self-reliance were cardinal virtues, and who had grown up in that belief cold and hard and unloving, strong-willed and wayward — would she ever be softened into showing any sign of tenderness or gentleness again? A cold, aching doubt fell on the widow's mother-heart as she asked herself these questions, to which no answer would come.

But in these days Mrs. Wynburn was a brave little

woman, as patient to endure as she was strong to love; and she went back to Edinburgh neither down-cast nor unhopeful. Fortunately her work was not in any degree distasteful to her, neither was her Scottish home in any respect an unhappy one; indeed, she had often laughed with her friend, Jessie Macdonald (who, unfortunately, spent only six weeks of each year in Edinburgh), over her previous ideas of what her fate would be—ideas gathered chiefly from certain most heart-rending three-volume histories of the woes and afflictions of governess-life. Yet, fortunate as she was in all this, her life had still some dark hours in it—hours of passionate longing for her dead husband, for her living child; hours wherein the wild yearning of her human heart for human sympathy was all but stronger than her powers of control. It was impossible but that such hours should come: they come to us all some time or other in our lives. Hours wherein—beset with the darkness and strife that surround us in this world—we grope blindly, wildly, faithlessly, for rays of light and comfort from another. We kneel and pray—strong, earnest prayers, perhaps—feeling within ourselves the while a terrible insuppressible consciousness that they are prayers which cannot prevail; that ‘we have not because we ask amiss’; that souls like ours, created and specially destined for a higher existence, with faculties and capabilities

formed for such intercourse and communion as we may not even dream of here, can never be fully satisfied with the changeful love, the negative sympathy, which we desire with such passionate longing. And yet we go on desiring—well for us if we go on praying, too—praying to be taught how to pray, and remembering ‘what the Unjust Judge saith.’ God may bear long with us, but an answer *will* come, though it may be neither at the hour nor in the manner we look for it.

Time passed on till Sophie’s sixteenth summer was waning into autumn, when Mrs. Wynburn received a letter from her father requesting her immediate return home. She came at once, and was inexpressibly shocked to find that Mrs. Dunning, whom she had left in vigorous health, was not expected to live many days. Quietly and efficiently Mrs. Wynburn took her place at the bedside of her stepmother, and with watchful, tender care she strove day and night to alleviate the pain which no human skill could remove. Her efforts were not unappreciated, nor perhaps quite unavailing; for, contrary to Dr. Elton’s expectations, Mrs. Dunning lingered nearly five weeks after Mrs. Wynburn’s return.

Such is a brief outline of the past events of the widowhood of the lady whom we left sitting in

thoughtful attitude in the dining-room of Cornborough Vicarage. It was a pleasant room to be in this cold December evening. The soft glow of the lamp and the fitful firelight glimmered on the dark oak-paneling of the walls, lit up the crimson curtains, the old-fashioned damask-covered chairs, and the curiously carved oaken sideboard of ancient date which occupied one side of the room, and lent a touch of softness to the portrait of Mr. Dunning that would, if permanent, have ruined the artist's reputation for truthfulness. Opposite to this portrait there was another, that of the first Mrs. Dunning. No effect of earthly light was needed to enhance the charm of that.

As I must endeavour to give the reader some idea of the personal appearance of Mrs. Wynburn, I need not describe the portrait of her mother, for it would not have required very acute perception to perceive the resemblance between them. This resemblance was not perfect—not so perfect as it became afterwards—for the sign of the baptism of suffering was not yet so legibly marked on the forehead of the Vicar's daughter as it had been on that of his first wife.

Mrs. Wynburn was now about thirty-five years of age, but so slight and fragile in figure that in spite of the widow's cap which she still wore she looked much younger. She was not pretty, her face was too pale

and careworn for that; but her small features were regular and full of character, her hair dark and soft, and her blue-gray eyes were expressive—expressive of some rare qualities. There was in them an indescribable mixture of firmness and tenderness, of decision and softness; they were the eyes of a person who never forgets, never changes. There was also a shade of something that passed for sadness in them at times, 'a dree leuk,' old James used to call it when she was a child, predicting from it that 'little Miss Mary wasn't lang for this world,' but this prediction had not been verified: her life, as she looked back upon it to-night, seemed to have been very long indeed, and, with the exception of her childhood and the ten months of her married life, very sad.

But Mrs. Wynburn's thoughts did not dwell much on the past; there was too much in the present and the future to claim her attention. The month which had elapsed since Mrs. Dunning's death had been one of much hope and fear—hope that she might not have to leave her home again; fear that her father's intentions were altogether inimical to that hope. But the consent which he had given this evening had set her mind at rest as far as that was concerned, and filled her heart with hope and thankfulness.

It is strange how a few stray gleams of happiness slanting across the life of a person unaccustomed to

such irradiation will change the whole current of thought and feeling, heightening every hope, smoothing every difficulty, and infusing new tone and vitality into every faculty of soul, mind, and body. Mrs. Wynburn felt this change to-night as she had not felt it for many years. Every power of her nature seemed instinct with new life and vigour, new capacity for thought, new energy for effort; there was only one difficulty that would not be smoothed away, only one cup of hope which she trembled to raise to her lips.

What would Sophie be like now? That was the unanswerable question, the perplexing doubt. Mrs. Wynburn had been abroad during part of the time which had passed since she had been at Cornborough before, in consequence of which she had not seen her child for three long years. Sophie was little more than thirteen years of age then; she was turned sixteen now. Surely some change would have taken place in her, some kindly influence have neutralized the effects of her early training. And Mrs. Wynburn felt that she was by no means without foundation for this hope, for of late Sophie's letters had been so much more natural and unconstrained than they used to be. 'Such sensible letters they are,' Mrs. Wynburn said to herself; 'so full of high-toned thought, so free from commonplaces and littlenesses. She must be good. I know we shall be happy. I am wrong, un-

grateful to doubt it. I may have much to do, much to undo; for my child has never known a mother's care. May God help me to do my duty faithfully—not for my own sake, for His—remembering that I must one day give to Him “an account of my stewardship.” ’

The following week Mrs. Wynburn spent in preparing Sophie's room—the same little room which she had always occupied next to her own. The old moreen curtains, which had been dyed and re-dyed, were taken down and replaced by new white dimity. With her own deft fingers she made a pink-and-white cover for the dressing-table and a pincushion to match. Each time she went up the town she brought back some little thing—a vase, or a photograph, or a work-basket—to make Sophie's room look bright and pretty. Her little store of money might be growing less, but Sophie was coming home.

The next few days she devoted to her easel. She drew well for an amateur, and succeeded in producing an effective little drawing to hang up in Sophie's room. It was taken from an original sketch—one she had done when she was at home some years before—representing a sunrise in one of the neighbouring dales. The sun itself was not visible, but its rays, breaking upward through hazy clouds, tinged the

top of Langholme Howe with faint rose-colour, threw lines of soft light along the ridges of the distant hills, and stole very dreamily through the valley which occupied the middle distance. The foreground was yet enveloped in purple-gray mist. A cottage to the left stood high enough to receive one gleam of light across its roof, and the dew on the topmost foliage of some surrounding trees looked rather sheeny; but the rest of the details were lost in picturesque shadows. When the drawing was done, it was sent to be framed, and then it was put up in its place. Very pretty the little room looked when the last finishing touches had been added, when all had been done that a tasteful eye and a loving heart could suggest.

CHAPTER II.

A JOURNEY TO BRENFIELD.

FIVE days later Mrs. Wynburn started for Derby; there was no line to Brenfield. The morning was cold and raw, the fog rolled in mystic, giant forms over the Yorkshire hills, along the Yorkshire dales, stood in drops like bead-rows on the frames of the opacous carriage windows; the landscape was left to the imagination; but the few silent, depressed-looking

passengers by the 7.30 a.m. train from Cornborough to York gave evidence abundant that they were in no mood for investing nature with imaginary charms.

11.30 a.m. And as the train steamed under the arch of an ancient gateway in the walls of the city of York, previous to entering the old station, the sun glinted faintly through the dissolving mist; things seemed brighter, warmer, more life-like; and as Mrs. Wynburn walked along the crowded platform something of the busy, bustling spirit of the place entered into her. Half an hour by the waiting-room fire, a cup of warm coffee, and life, present and prospective, assumed an altogether different hue.

'Train for Derby, ma'am! leaves at 12.45; arrives 3.50.' . . . Then she had three-quarters of an hour to wait yet. Was there time to run up and see the Minster again? Yes; just a look at the outside, and perhaps one peep through the chancel screen. Even that would do her good; for was she not a Yorkshirewoman? and do we not—every man, woman, and child of us—look upon the Minster as personal property, and feel that there is not room enough in our hearts for the pride that thrills us when we see it again after long absence?

York — Ousegate — Ousebridge, and close upon Christmastide! What a noisy, bustling scene it is! How cheery, how pleasant! The sun is shining out

brilliantly now, sparkling on the surface of the river, twinkling on the wet decks of the gaily-painted barges, lighting up the windows of the sombre old houses, searching anywhere and everywhere for response, keeping up a perpetual antiphon of gleam and glitter.

Mrs. Wynburn threads her way deftly along the crowded pavement, pleased, amused, self-forgetting as a little child. What is she thinking of now? Only an old prophetic proverb :

‘ Lincoln was, London is, and York shall be
The greatest city of the three.’

When will it be fulfilled? she wonders. ‘ Not till the Thames rolls under the arches of Ousebridge,’ the sceptics say.

‘ What serious-looking, business-like people we Yorkshire town-folk are!’ she thinks as she walks along Coney Street. Everyone looks, not only as if he knew exactly where he was going, and why he was going, but as if his special little ‘ why’ was of the most urgent importance. Not a loiterer, not a listless-looking person, to be seen.

Ah! the west front at last. Sublime, glorious, in its lofty majestic grandeur. And an indraught of solemn sensation sweeps over her, suffusing her whole soul with its wondrous, ineffable power.

Reverently she crosses the Minster Yard. The western door is open, fortunately; and as she enters

the nave, every note of her heart's harmony quivers into unison. Low, soft, *adagio* airs: spirit stirred into strains of devotion and veneration. Awakening new life, new consciousness of the presence of the 'things which are not seen.' Inspiring new gratitude, new hope; giving new meaning to the ancient words, 'Nevertheless I am always by thee.'

She would fain stay long. It is such rest, such peace: and as she pauses for a moment before the grand old diapered lancet-windows which fill the north gable, she thinks: 'If I am ever in great trouble again I will come here.'

In the morning—the cold, damp, misty morning—she had not felt happy, nor hopeful. Her thoughts had been of Sophie, of course, but they had not been the thoughts which had animated her during the past few days. She had felt disquieted, excited by restless, questioning doubts,—she had fought against them,—reaction had followed, and a heavy, painful weight had settled upon her spirits that was worse to bear than the restlessness. 'I suppose if I were superstitious,' she had said to herself, 'I should call these thoughts "presentiments"; but I ought to know by this time what kind of effect depressing weather always has upon me. I will try not to think of Sophie any more till I get to Brenfield. I shall only work myself up into a state of nervousness if I do.'

This resolution she had kept pretty well hitherto. Now, as she stands watching the subdued light stealing through the ancient windows, finding herself quite alone, she kneels for a moment, covers her face—her prayer is for Sophie!

Comforted, encouraged, she leaves the Minster—leaves it as one would leave a loving, soothing friend, with much regret, much gratitude. The sunshine had gladdened her heart before: it seems to reach her soul now. Her thoughts, as she walks back to the station, are a Psalm of Thankfulness.

The afternoon journey began brightly. There was not much that was picturesque in the north inland winter landscape, but there was a glittering of sunbeams without and within that lit up the fast-moving panorama wondrously. She was alone; but solitude was welcome. She read. Her book was pleasant, she thought—her thoughts were pleasant! The spirit-tones of the Minster music were still audible.

It is nearly dark as Mrs. Wynburn steps into the cab which is to take her to Brenfield,—nearly dark, and very cold: and she is too tired and hungry to feel much interested in watching the people passing to and fro in the gas-lit streets, or in and out of the brilliantly-lighted shops. Indeed, it is rather a relief when the last gas-lamp is passed;—she can shut her eyes and

think now. She will think of Sophie—there are only three miles between them.

Brenfield at last! The lights twinkle in the cottage-windows; the blaze from the forge at the blacksmith's shop casts a ruddy glow upon a group of labourers and farm-lads; the church and the Rectory-gates are passed, and the cab stops at Brenfield House.

The cabman is paid and dismissed. A housemaid answers the bell, and Mrs. Wynburn finds herself shaking hands with Miss Leyton, inquiring, in a voice tremulous with cold, hunger, fatigue, 'How is Sophie?'

'Sophie is quite well,' answers Miss Leyton. 'They are at tea in the dining-room. You will come and have dinner with me in my own little room—it is quite ready. Sophie is to spend the evening with us afterwards. . . . Or would you like to see her first?' she adds, noticing a change on the white, tired little face.

'I should like to see her first for a moment, if I may.'

'Certainly;' and Miss Leyton rings the bell. 'Martin, will you ask Miss Wynburn to come here?'

'I will leave you,' Miss Leyton says. 'Sophie will show you to your room, and bring you down to my little den when you are ready for dinner.'

A minute later the door opens again. Another

lady enters. Tall, beautiful, young, but so stately, well-proportioned, self-assured, that you would not believe how young she is. It is Sophia Wynburn, and she is not yet seventeen. Mrs. Wynburn doubts, hesitates for a moment—only for a moment. ‘It is Sophie!’ and the mother’s arms are round her child and a long, true mother-kiss given before she has quite recovered from her doubt. Then she looks up—her eyes luminous with the love, the pride, the gratitude that fill her heart. She tries to speak—tries, and fails—

‘For words are weak and most to seek
When wanted fifty-fold;
And then if silence will not speak
Or trembling lip and changing cheek,
There’s nothing told.’

There is nothing told now. Sophie moves, gently, yet resistingly, places for her mother the easiest chair the room affords, crosses the rug, leans her arm on the mantelpiece.

‘How is my grandfather?’ she inquires, in a clear, steady voice.

‘He is better; he has improved much of late. How surprised he will be to find you so grown, so altered, Sophie!’

‘You forget, mother, that I have spent my holidays at home.’

‘So you have, dear. I *had* forgotten for the

moment; forgotten, too, that Hannah told me you were "grown quite out o' ken."

'Poor old Hannah! how is she getting on?'

'She is quite well, dear. But I must not keep Miss Leyton's dinner waiting. Will you come with me to my room?'

The *tête-à-tête* dinner in Miss Leyton's cosy little sitting-room was drawing to a close before Sophie's name was mentioned. It was too near the mother's heart to come readily to her lips. Clever, far-seeing Miss Leyton thought it better to let food and wine and warmth take due effect upon her guest before introducing a topic so likely to gain attention. But Mrs. Wynburn's appetite was soon appeased. She was overwrought, overworn. Her mind was not yet quite at rest, her heart not yet fully satisfied. Eating was troublesome.

Would Sophie come to them as soon as dinner was over? she wondered. It was so strange to be in the same house with her, still feeling almost a stranger to her, and not to be doing anything to put the strangeness away. Her heart yearned to make haste to know her child; to get to feel closer to her; to feel that she was all her own—her very own.

Ah! that last thought was a ruthless one—sudden, painful, incisive as a sting; and the widow's nervous

system is in a state of too high tension not to feel it acutely. It strains the tension still higher: all her faculties seem strung up to unusual keenness of tone now, imagination especially. . . . It is not Miss Leyton who is sitting there, it is her husband—her own true Louis. Sophie is not *all* her own now, she is part his; and they—father and daughter—are together before her. They are so like—so wonderfully like each other. The same clear, rich olive colour. The same abundant, wavy, light-brown hair. The same dark, steel-blue eyes. Ah! the eyes do differ a little, but it is only in expression.

‘Do you take cheese?’ asks Miss Leyton, in a brisk, cheery tone.

‘No, thank you,’ Mrs. Wynburn replies, looking slightly *distraine*.

Miss Leyton’s honest brown eyes have in them a smile of amusement as she watches her guest’s face for a few moments. Then she breaks the silence, which she thinks is again becoming rather awkward.

‘Has Sophie told you of her success on Tuesday?’

‘Tuesday?—oh, the examination day! No; she did not say anything about it. We hadn’t much time for conversation. Then she has been successful?’

‘Successful! Yes, indeed. She has carried off three out of the six prizes I give to the first division,

and she might have had two others if she had cared to compete for them.'

'Really! Has she been working hard?'

'Unnecessarily hard. I told her six weeks ago that she was in advance of her class; but work of some kind seems a necessity of Sophie's nature. I wish some of her companions resembled her more in that respect.'

'Has she made many friends amongst them—intimate friends, I mean?' asked Mrs. Wynburn, with a slight effort.

Miss Leyton paused a moment; but she was not in the habit of equivocating.

'No,' she replied, 'not one; and I cannot yet understand clearly *why* she has not. When she first came to me, five years ago, I thought—I was afraid she was hardly capable of affection for anything or anyone; but I have found out my mistake since.'

'Have you? How?' and there was subdued eagerness in the mother's tone.

'Chiefly by noticing her quiet, undemonstrative affection for very little children. To the elder girls—especially to those who show any sign of their involuntary admiration of her talents and high principles—she is as frigid and indifferent as it is possible for anyone to be. Even to me she has been disappointing. I have been interested in her from the

first. At times I have felt almost fascinated by her strange words and ways; but the very gifts that attract one's interest seem to give her power to repel one's sympathy. And yet I am convinced that her apparent cold-heartedness does not extend far below the surface. It disappears at once if anyone is ill or in trouble, and she never loses an opportunity of doing a kind or unselfish action if she can do it unperceived.'

This was 'oil of gladness' to the widow's heart. An hour later, as she sat by her daughter's side on the little chintz-covered sofa in Miss Leyton's drawing-room, trying to feel very happy and to seem quite at ease, but in reality beginning to feel more chilled and less hopeful every moment, she recalled Miss Leyton's words. 'I must not forget what I have been told this evening,' she said to herself.

The conversation carried on by the three ladies was of a very desultory nature; and, for a time, very unequally divided. At first, by far the greater portion fell to Miss Leyton's share; fortunately, she possessed the pleasant gift of being able to chatter amusingly upon a variety of topics, with very slight aid from her interlocutors, but happening to allude incidentally to the then recent execution of the Emperor Maximilian, Sophie interrupted her, with an earnestness that was almost startling:

‘Pardon me, Miss Leyton, it was a murder, not an execution.’

‘Was it, Sophie? I do not imagine ex-President Juarez looks upon himself exactly as a murderer, though.’

‘Neither do I look upon him as such. Napoleon III. of France was the murderer of Maximilian of Mexico, and also the destroyer of the Empress Charlotte’s reason.’

‘Sophie, Sophie, I shall regret having allowed you so much latitude in your reading if you have adopted such an opinion as that.’

‘It is an opinion that has been forming itself in my mind for some time; and I hold that the guilt of the Emperor of France amounts to a crime of far deeper nature than the writers of any of the articles I have read appear to admit.’

‘You forget, dear, that before the Emperor of France broke his faith with the Emperor of Mexico there was a great strain upon it.’

‘Slight faith it must have been to yield to strain of any kind!’

Miss Leyton smiled. She knew from experience the inutility of trying to confute one of Sophie’s slowly-formed opinions; so she wisely gave up the attempt.

“Convince a man against his will,
He’s of the same opinion still.”

I suppose that is a truth which applies equally to a woman,' she thought to herself.

After tea Miss Leyton suggested some music. Sophie sat down to the piano first, and played part of Schubert's exquisite 'Sonata in A Minor.' She played it without the music, and seemed to play rather from mood than memory, lingering over the *andante* and tripping through the *scherzo* in most appreciative manner. She broke off abruptly, and then Miss Leyton sang some old Scotch songs. Her voice was rather thin, and perhaps somewhat *passée*, but there was still much tenderness and pathos in it; and as the last notes of 'The Land o' the Leal' died away the eyes of one of her auditors were not quite so bright as usual.

So the evening passed on.

Next morning Mrs. Wynburn was amused to find herself sitting down to breakfast with Miss Leyton, three ladies, who were introduced as Mademoiselle Lelacheur, Fräulein Schröter, and Miss Taylor, sixteen schoolgirls, and two little boys. The French lady chattered in very good English, the German lady looked inquiries through her spectacles, and the English lady looked conscious of being a model of the strictest propriety.

After breakfast Sophie called Miss Taylor aside, and asked if she would assist in preventing anything

like a scene when the moment of departure came. Miss Taylor promised willingly.

‘Would it not be better to come to the music-room to say “good-bye”?’ she inquired. ‘It will seem to make less commotion there than in the hall.’

‘Yes, certainly. Thank you for thinking of it.’

So Sophie’s undemonstrative leave-takings were gone through upstairs. Some of the very little girls cried; so did one neglected-looking big girl; so did little Charlie Russell. Willie was six years old; it was not to be expected that he should cry, but he gave vent to his feelings by punching Charlie for doing so.

So Sophie came downstairs. The cab from the village inn drove up to the door; her trunks were placed on the top of it, and Mrs. Wynburn and her daughter said ‘good-bye’ to Miss Leyton and Brenfield House for ever. The reader must do so too, if he pleases. We shall not see them again.

There are people—not necessarily people of narrow or uncultivated minds—who, when they are under the influence of mental pressure of any kind, find it impossible to look at anything but through the medium of ideas connected with their anxiety. Mrs. Wynburn was one of these. Her need of Sophie’s love; her

longing for any, the smallest sign of it; her desire to be doing something to win it, coloured all things, inward and outward.

During the early part of their journey our travellers were *tête-à-tête*. Sophie read 'Coriolanus.' Mrs. Wynburn wondered whether it was the halo which mother-love had thrown round her child that made her look so beautiful, or whether other people would see the same precious charms of roundness, rich colouring and soft texture, of wavy, abundant hair, luminous eyes and perfect health. It seemed impossible that anyone should *not* be able to see them; but it appeared to be equally impossible that anyone should see them with her eyes.

Sophie put down her book presently, and looked up with an absorbed, unconscious expression of thought and softness on her face that made her look lovelier than ever. She had been reading 'Volumnia's' last appeal to her son. A few words, almost at the close of it, had struck an unknown chord somewhere. . . . Sophie was listening to it.

With wistful, love-hungry eyes Mrs. Wynburn sat watching her. Yearning with an almost unspeakable intensity to throw her arms round her child, to tell her how she loved her, how she had longed for her through years of weariness and loneliness, and how her heart was overflowing now with the joy of having

regained her treasure, but words, or courage to utter them, failed. It was well.

They sat some time in silence ; then Sophie asked if her mother was comfortable, and why she had not brought an air-cushion ? Mrs. Wynburn smiled, and thanked her daughter. ‘ She had travelled much,’ she said, ‘ and frequently without an air-cushion.’ Then she bent forward, and laid her thin, nervous-looking hand on Sophie’s larger but equally characteristic one.

‘ I am so happy, my child !’ she said.

‘ Are you, mother ?’

There was little response in the words—less in the tone. Sophie disengaged her hand, took up her book again, closed it with a gesture of impatience, and turned to another page. Mrs. Wynburn noticed a slight flush of colour on her face. Could these be signs of annoyance ?

I will not weary the reader with another description of an uneventful journey. It might be as tedious to him as the journey itself was to our travellers before the day was over. And yet it was a day to which Mrs. Wynburn afterwards looked back with a degree of pleasure. It was the first day of an experience of a new order of things—of being looked after and cared for by one whom she had only thought of hitherto as needing her care and protection. She

could not understand the strange reversal at first. How should she? Her life had for years been spent so entirely for others, and the demands upon her time and services had been so incessant, that she felt guilty of dereliction of duty when Sophie insisted upon looking after the luggage, questioning the porters, and ordering tea while her mother rested. If Sophie did all these things in a cold, silent, unsympathetic manner that almost neutralized the value of them, it was a fact which her mother wisely forbore to see.

CHAPTER III.

HOME.

‘I SUPPOSE my grandfather is in the study, Susan?’

‘No, Miss Sophie; James has just wheeled his chair into the dining-room. He said he should like to have tea with you and your mamma this evening.’

‘I am not in the habit of calling my mother “mamma,” Susan, and I would prefer that you should speak of her as Mrs. Wynburn, if you please.’

‘Oh, very well, Miss Sophie; just as you choose,’ said the girl, colouring and turning away.

A few minutes later Mrs. Wynburn and Sophie

entered the dining-room together. Mr. Dunning's reception of his daughter was, as usual, courteous and polite; but the latter had rarely been so surprised as she was at witnessing the meeting between her father and her child. The idea that anything like real affection existed between them had never entered her mind: it seemed impossible even now; and yet there was no mistaking the quiet yet evident signs of emotion which both exhibited. Mr. Dunning's eyes grew bright and earnest as Sophie stooped to kiss him; a faint flush of colour overspread his pallid face, contrasting curiously with his thin white hair; and his voice trembled as his daughter had seldom heard it as he said in a solemn tone, 'May God bless you, Sophia!'

Sophie sat down on the rug at his feet, laid her head against the side of his chair, and, taking his white, worn-looking hand in hers, began stroking it with a soft, gentle touch, that seemed inexpressibly soothing to the nervous, irritable invalid. Mrs. Wynburn's perplexity increased every moment.

Very little conversation was attempted. Susan bustled in and out of the room looking very *courroucée*. 'Tea is ready,' she said at last, and then disappeared abruptly. If the reader pleases we will follow her into the kitchen for a few moments. The bright fire will amply compensate for the sanded

floor this cold December evening ; and Susan's pretty face ought to weigh well in the scale against old Hannah's Yorkshire dialect.

As we enter the kitchen we perceive that these two are 'having a little difference'—not an unusual occurrence by any means, as the tall, rugged-looking old man sitting by the fire would tell us. This old man is James, gardener, bath-chairman, and valet-de-chambre to the Vicar of Cornborough. A notable, worthy old man, too, notwithstanding his rough leather leggings and corduroys, conspicuous brass buttons, and loosely-tied red neckerchief.

'Ah wish you women foalk wad ha' deän squabbling!' James remarks ; 'ye're allus at it.'

'Now, James,' Susan begins, in the mincing Southern tongue which is so irritating to the two old people—'now, James, you cross old fellow, don't you speak unless you are going to take my part! You know as well as I do that Miss Sophie hadn't ought to speak to me in that way the moment she entered the house. I tried all I could to please her when she was here at Midsummer, and I didn't expect to be treated in this way. It's too bad ; and she only a girl of sixteen.'

'An' pray ya what aäge may *you* be, miss, 'at ya sud leuk for respect fra' yer betters o' that scoore?' interposes old Hannah. 'Ya'd better be deëing some

o' yer wark 'at ye're so fond o' leavin' for other foälks te deä, i'steäd o' sittin' chatterin' there like a magpie; or else i'steäd o' talkin' o' what ya did for Miss Sophie at Midsummer, let's hear o' what she did for ya when ya were i' bed three daäys wiv' a sick headaäche. Tell us hoo mony tahmes a daäy she ran up an' doon stääirs wi' yer tea an' yer saga an' yer messes; an' hoo oft she helped ya te mak' beds, an' clean grates, an' sweep carpets when ya were lanter'd* wi' yer bit o' wark.'

'Well, I never said she didn't.'

'Like anuff not, Madam Silver-tongue—like anuff not; ah could laäy a pund tiv' a penny 'at ya'd forgotten all aboot it. . . . There, that's t' dahnin'-room bell; but mebbe ya'd like te deä anuther inch or tweä o' tattin' afore ya answer 't.'

'I should like to do another point or two,' says Susan, tripping out of the kitchen.

Miss Susan Steele, the very pretty and very pert young woman whom we have just introduced to the reader, had contrived to establish a popular belief that she was also very clever. Having twice passed in Standard VI. at the school of her native village, she had come to pride herself not a little on her 'superior education,' and perhaps not without grounds. Indeed (*sotto voce* be it spoken), I imagine Mrs.

° Behindhand.

Wynburn herself would have hesitated before consenting to stand side by side with Susan in a competitive examination. How the tiny morsel of white lace and pink satin ribbon, which Susan called her 'Marie Stuart cap,' contrived to cover so much information concerning the map of the world, the Reformation, bills of parcels, etc., I do not know; but certain it is that in Susan's box there was a prize-volume, on the fly-leaf of which was written a certificate of her acquaintance with these branches of education. This volume had been shown to Mrs. Wynburn, and with reluctance I confess that the remembrance of it added considerably to the tremulousness which that lady felt whenever Susan's attention had to be drawn to the undusted drawing-room, the scratched silver, or the opaque glass.

The knowledge of Miss Susan's varied acquirements had a very different effect upon old Hannah—poor old Hannah, who could neither read nor write.

'What's t' use o' all yer larnin',' she would say, 'when ya can't leet a fire athoot as much wood as 'ud leet a dozen; an' wastin' mair matches nor yer daäy's work's worth? Larnin' 'ull niver bring ya saut te yer taties, seä ya needn't expect it; an' as for marryin', ah'd like to see t' chap as 'ud marry a flee-be-sky like you.'

'I'm in no hurry to marry, Hannah, as you know;

and, what is more, I've taken care that other people know it too.'

'Ay, ay! likely anuff, likely anuff! Ye'll be yan o' them 'at goäs throo' t' wood, and throo' t' wood, and tak's up a creuked stick at last.'

But Susan is re-entering the kitchen with her tray, putting it down with a bang that makes one wonder why the glass and china do not fly into atoms instead of jingling in that futile manner.

'James,' she says musically, 'Mr. D. is ready to be moved into the drawing-room.'

Very easily and noiselessly the high wheels of the invalid's chair glide across the hall and into the drawing-room. Sophie holds the door open—she is about to offer to assist in wheeling the chair round the sofa, but she recollects herself in time. It is the old gardener's especial pride to take that curve gracefully, and to deposit his master with mathematical precision, and without perceptible effort, upon a certain spot, indicated by the pattern of the carpet. James does it splendidly this time, darts a comic glance of satisfaction at Mrs. Wynburn, pulls the first lock of his gray hair that comes to hand, and goes back to his seat by the kitchen fire.

'What *should* we do without old James?' Mrs. Wynburn says, as the echo of his footstep on the stone pavement dies away in the distance.

The long, narrow drawing-room of Cornborough Vicarage, like almost every other room in the house, was quaint, heavy, and old-fashioned; but a most pleasant atmosphere of homeliness and comfort pervaded it. The walls had originally been panelled, perhaps with oak as black as that in the dining-room; but shortly after Mr. Dunning's second marriage the panelling had been painted a dingy green colour, making the few old paintings which decorated the room look like blots of yellowish-brown. There was no lack of incongruous colouring. Some of the cumbrous antiquely-shaped chairs and sofas were covered with crimson velvet, others with worsted work of amazing colour and bewildering pattern, and faded cushions of blue and green and yellow, in stripes and squares and diamonds, spoke of bygone years of industrious knitting from every available chair and sofa in the room. On the mantelpiece, side-tables, tops of cabinets, and other places, a wonderful collection of old china was displayed—tureens and punch-bowls, jars and vases, teapots and teacups of almost every conceivable size, shape, colour, pattern, and degree of thinness. Some of this china had belonged to the family of the first Mrs. Dunning, and consequently was of especial value in the eyes of Mrs. Wynburn.

The fire which sheds such a harmonizing glow

through this unfashionable room is of unusual size and brightness ; but caloric is rarely at a discount in the North Riding on bleak December evenings. It is very bleak this evening ; the wind is rising, moaning round the house, rattling amongst the chimneys, shivering through the leafless trees, and snow or sleet is beginning to drive against the windows in most vehement manner. Very good it is not to be entirely dependent for shelter upon her whom the poets apostrophize as 'gentle nature' on such an evening as this.

Mr. Dunning enjoys keenly the warmth of the blazing fire as he sits listening to the approaching storm. He wonders how it will fare with those at sea to-night, and then glances at his daughter for a moment as if trying to read *her* thoughts. Then his mind wanders off to the few aged poor of his parish, and he remembers with thankfulness that most of them are safe in comfortable almshouses.

'I wonder how old Ralph Williamson is this evening,' Mr. Dunning says presently.

'Is he ill, father?'

'Yes. Fenton says he believes the old man is literally dying of grief for the loss of his son.'

'Poor old man! I must go and see him to-morrow.'

'Yes, Mary ; I wish you would.'

‘Who has played the organ since John Williamson died?’ Sophie inquired.

‘Miss Couchley, the schoolmistress.’

‘Does she play well?’

‘No, Sophia; I wish she did. The churchwardens tell me that the parishioners are complaining loudly of both music and singing. . . . I have been thinking lately of asking you, Mary, if you could undertake the organ. You used to practise on it some years ago.’

‘Yes; I could take it, father; but do you think Miss Couchley would like to give it up?’

‘I imagine she will be only too glad to do so; but Mr. Fenton could tell you about that, probably; he visits the school, and knows more of her than I do.’

‘Mr. Fenton!—oh, the new curate, I suppose?’ said Sophie.

* * * * *

After some further conversation the bell was rung for James, and Mr. Dunning was wheeled back to his study. Mrs. Wynburn and her daughter remained in the drawing-room. For some time both were silent, both thoughtful.

I have told my little history—so much of it as I have written—unskilfully if the reader has not discovered that Sophie Wynburn’s character had undergone some changes; that it was still in a state of

transition, and capable of further improvement, I scarcely need say; but in natures like hers—strong, reserved, tenacious—new influence operates slowly.

But new influence had something more than nature to contend with now. The effects of Sophie's early training had been modified, but they still existed, and existed with sufficient force to assimilate the opinions and impressions of later years. Higher views of life and its meanings, clearer notions of her duty to others, and keener convictions of her inability to do such duty unaided, were being matured in her mind daily; but in the same field with this fair wheat some grain of more doubtful nature had appeared—grain which the soil was only too well fitted to nourish.

Reserved by nature, self-reliant by education, and endowed with the blessing of almost perfect health, Sophie had never for an hour known what it was to be dependent upon the kindness or affection of others for happiness, and, as a natural consequence, had come to believe that happiness so derived must be of very non-essential nature. In addition to this, she had adopted some strange, half-inarticulate notions that interchange of love and friendship, tenderness and sympathy, would require more than she was disposed to give—more unreserve, more outpouring of her inner self; and these notions had led her to look upon every advance towards intimacy as something

to be repressed with the strongest determination. 'I will strive,' she had said to herself—'I will strive to grow kinder and gentler and more amiable than I have been, but I will live my own life alone. I can live a happier life than people seem to do who trust to and lean upon others.

'My soul is not a pauper; I can live
At least my soul's life without alms from men.'

Had Sophie Wynburn been an ordinary susceptible school-girl, given to fanciful impressions, morbid feelings, and Byronic sentiment, there would have been something laughable in all this, but, at the same time, something hopeful, because of its certain transitoriness; but no such hope could be indulged with regard to her. The self-contained cold individuality, which made her so unapproachable and unintelligible, had become too surely part of herself to be easily laid aside.

But Mrs. Wynburn understood nothing of all this as yet. She remembered what her child had been five, nay, even three years ago—harsh, and hard, and self-willed; she saw her now polite, courteous, and *prévenante*, and she felt grateful. She could not persuade herself that there was nothing left to desire, that she felt no disappointment, her love was too deep and penetrating for that; but she strove hard to feel hopeful.

‘I see no reason why my child should not learn to love me in time,’ the widow said to herself; ‘she has learnt to love my father, to love him tenderly; surely I can teach, or rather win, her to return such love as mine.’

But Sophie’s love for her grandfather was not a thing to be argued from; it was a peculiar love existing between two peculiar and not dissimilar natures. It had grown up so gradually and so spontaneously that neither could say when it had become a recognisable presence. There was no special understanding between them, no confidences given or required; both were content with the tacit mutual feeling that they were nearer to each other than to anyone else, and both were conscious that this affection derived additional value from the fact that it had been given unintentionally. . . . Love like this rarely reproduces itself under different conditions.

To-night, as Sophie sits looking into the fire trying to mould the future which lies before her into something like distinctness of form, to mark out with precision the place which her mother will occupy in that future, some unanticipated difficulties arise. Fragments of thought which have passed vaguely through her mind during the day return in more definite and palpable shape.

‘How mistaken I have been in my ideas of my

mother!' she is thinking; 'how little I have really known of her until to-day, until the knowledge is too late to be of any use! Yes, it is too late; I can never be what my mother's daughter should have been, never be what I might have been if I had grown up by her side. . . . How strange it is that she should feel so much more affection for me than I shall ever be able to feel for her—than I ever wish to feel for anyone! We have never seen much of each other, we have lived our separate lives happily enough hitherto; why should she not be as contented as I am, without straining after that which cannot be?

'She is trying to seem content; perhaps my best plan would be to try to believe she is so. If I have to go on feeling daily and hourly that she is expecting a love which I cannot give, her presence will be a perpetual reproach, perhaps even a burden to me, and it will be all the worse because she will try to hide what she is thinking and feeling, and she will not succeed. Something in her look and voice betrays her at every turn. . . . I would rather her affection had been of the noisy and gushing kind, after the manner of Mrs. Graham's. It would never have troubled my thoughts as I fear this will.'

And so Sophie went on planning, conjecturing, resolving, wondering why people could not live their

lives alongside of each other independently; why poets, and novelists, and essayists should write, and people should think, and speak, and act as if love and sympathy were the only things in the world worth caring for. Deciding at length that such views of the needs of humanity were of very low order indeed, she dismissed the subject, and talked pleasantly to her mother till time for prayers.

An hour or two later the inmates of Cornborough Vicarage were, with one exception, asleep. This one, Mrs. Wynburn, was alone in her own room, walking up and down with slow step, white, rigid face, and tightly-clasped hands, listening to the rushing of the wild terrible storm that was raging outside, and striving to still the memories of the dead past by prayers for help and guidance in the living present.

The memories were these :

On just such a night as this, and just about seventeen years before, Mrs. Wynburn and her husband were sitting in the pretty newly-furnished drawing-room of Clayburn Rectory sketching some plans for the laying out of the new garden they intended to make in the spring. They had only been married ten months, but they had been months of such inexpressible happiness that Mrs. Wynburn's heart had grown to her new home as if she had lived in it twice ten years. Unlike her old home,

from which it was only five miles distant, Clayburn Rectory was of very modern date—new and Gothic, bare and treeless, and perched half-way up the side of the cliff which overhung the village. The village itself—a collection of small rough-looking cottages, chiefly occupied by fishermen—stood at the bottom of a deep ravine, formed by an opening in the rugged cliffs which skirt the north-eastern coast. It was a bleak spot, but happiness takes root in any soil whatever, so there be space enough in the heart for it to grow.

That there was space enough in the hearts of these two one glance would have revealed. Mrs. Wynburn was sitting by the table, pencil in hand, having, as she said with ill-concealed satisfaction, ‘all the work to do herself,’ while her husband was leaning over her chair watching her with an affectionate tenderness that showed his interest in the plans to be a very divided interest indeed. Then tea was brought in, and the Rector was persuaded to sit down in his own armchair and be waited upon by his wife. That was a point she would never give up; how else could she find an excuse for perching herself on the arm of the said huge chair to drink her own cup of tea? and tea was not worth drinking in any other position. But she sat in her self-chosen place as usual to-night, and the tea was very good—‘uncommonly good,’ the

Rector said, as he asked for a second cup; but as Mrs. Wynburn handed it to him, stooping in wifely fashion as she did so to kiss his forehead, the drawing-room door was opened again.

‘Please, Jacob Noble has just been up, sir. There’s a schooner on the rock, and there isn’t hands enough ashore to man the lifeboat.’

In a second Mr. Wynburn was in the hall. Seizing his hat and overcoat, giving his wife a hurried kiss, and bidding her be very quiet, he rushed down the narrow path that led from the Rectory to the beach. Mrs. Wynburn stood straining her eyes after him as he went out into the darkness, chiding herself for allowing her heart to beat so wildly in response to the vague, indefinite terrors which she felt creeping over her. But the chiding was useless, the terror uncontrollable. The storm was sweeping round the house with a violence she had not heard, or rather had not noticed, till now; and every gust of wind and driving rain, every rattling door and window, seemed to increase her fears tenfold. She returned to the drawing-room, and tried to work, to read, to pray—anything that would keep away that terrible shadow. But it was the shadow of an Unseen Presence—a Presence from which none may turn aside. . . . Three hours later the corpse of her husband was borne into the house, the salt-water dripping from his clothing, the

seaweed tangled in his hair—the hair her fingers had been smoothing at the very moment when the shadow first fell—the cruel gash of the sharp rock across the forehead she had so lately kissed, the tender voice stilled, the loving eyes closed for ever—for ever. . . . Mary Wynburn made no cry, shed no tear; but from that day to the day when her baby was laid in her arms she had but one wish—the wish to follow her husband into the Silent Land; to await with him the dawning of another Day—a Day wherein ‘there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.’

This was seventeen years ago; but the voice of the night-wind still had its own special language for her ear—still spoke in wild, eerie accents of pain and sorrow and bereavement. Time had softened its tones a little; the rays of a new hope gleamed faintly on the edges of the dark storm-clouds; but on nights like this the grave in the churchyard by the sea still gave up its dead to her faithful memory. She still had need to pray to Him who stilled the waves on the Sea of Galilee, that He would say to the waves of trouble that surged over her soul, ‘Peace, be still.’

PART II.

'Tis time and circumstance that tries us all ;
And they that temperately take their start,
And keep their souls indifferently sedate
Through much of good and evil, at the last
May find the weakness of their hearts thus tried.'

Philip Van Artevelde.

CHAPTER I.

JESSIE MACDONALD.

A FINE bright afternoon in spring, warm enough to make Mrs. Wynburn and her daughter feel quite idle as they wander up and down under the trees that skirt the paddock. There may be another cause for Mrs. Wynburn's feeling of enervation: it is Monday, and she is organist now, and there are people in the parish who suspect that she is slightly nervous when she takes her place on the high stool behind the red curtain on Sundays. If this suspicion is correct, we can easily account for the languid, unstrung look she has to-day.

Sophie sees it: there are not many things that escape Sophie's penetrating eye.

'Will you not go in now, mother, and rest awhile?' she says.

'No, thank you dear,' Mrs. Wynburn replies; for,

like many other amiable people, she does not yield easily to slight persuasion, and, like almost all sufferers from loss of nervous energy, she feels that perfect rest is the last thing she has any inclination for. 'No, thank you, dear. Don't you think we had better go out on the moor for a walk? It is always so fresh and breezy up there.'

'Perhaps that would do you more real good,' Sophie replies considerately.

Out upon the moor the languid look vanished from Mrs. Wynburn's face very quickly. The fresh spring breezes swept across the heather; the purple mist hung dreamily over the distant hills; the sun tinged the rough, pointed edges of the crags with golden light; the clefts between lay in deep shadow. Here and there flocks of the black-faced moorland sheep fed quietly on patches of stunted grass, and now and then a bee hummed drowsily over the yellow whin-bushes that dotted the edges of hollows filled with orange and red bracken. And overhead, flitting tremulously away out of sight, and dropping showers of joyous harmony, soared 'the pilgrim of the sky':

'Bright gem instinct with music, vocal spark;
The happiest bird that sprang out of the Ark!'

'How different things seem up here on the hills!' Mrs. Wynburn said to herself; 'it is like being nearer heaven, further away from the disappointment

and the sick heart-hunger that seem so hard to bear at other times. It is long since I have felt so truly happy as I do to-day.'

'Have you heard from Miss Macdonald yet?' Sophie inquired, as they sat down to rest on a heap of dry fern.

'Yes, dear; I had a letter this morning. I forgot to tell you about it when you came in from the garden. It is such a nice letter. Would you like to read it?'

'Oh no, thank you, mother; you can tell me what she says.'

'She thinks she will be able to come to us the week after next, but I am afraid she cannot stay so long as I had hoped. She has promised to go into Hampshire to visit an invalid cousin. . . . You have not seen her since you were quite a little girl, Sophie. Do you remember her?'

'Yes, mother, quite well.'

And of what nature was Sophie's remembrance of Miss Macdonald? Mrs. Wynburn did not ask; she felt instinctively that her cold, cautious daughter would have little in common with her warm-hearted, sympathetic visitor. The consciousness was unwelcome, for Jessie Macdonald had for years been to her that rare and true blessing, a faithful friend. It was Jessie's influence that had secured for Mrs.

Wynburn her comfortable home in Scotland; and it was Jessie's friendship that had helped to soften the keen grief of early widowhood. The thought that her one friend and her one child were of such opposite natures was not a pleasant one.

Wandering back across the moor, down the glen, and into Kilham wood, how pleasant it was! How the noisy little beck gurgled over the mossy stones! how beautiful the trees looked just bursting into leaf—tender yellow greens, sweet, delicately-tinted shades of light-brown, and sombre hues of purple! How the ground was strewn with flowers of every colour—the turquoise blue forget-me-not, the pale primrose, the sweet violet, and the white, fragile wood-anemone. The tiny golden-green fern-fronds slowly uncurling themselves out of exquisitely-fashioned shells of brown satin tissue, fairy skeletons of last year's leaves lying in the pathway, gnarled old trunks of trees covered with lichens of every hue. How beautiful it all was! Why should people ever feel that anything can come between their souls and the soul of Him who fills the world with such glories as these? How is it that we feel for days and weeks and months together that our eyes are holden that we cannot see Him? There is only one answer.

A pleasant morning in the middle of June. The

trees full of leaf, the air musical with the song of birds and the hum of bees, and fragrant with the scent of flowers; summer and sunshine, bright colours and sweet sounds everywhere.

Mrs. Wynburn and her friend Jessie Macdonald, in straw hats and leather gloves, are feeding a brood of tiny chickens in the yard. Some grown-up cocks and hens are pecking and strutting about near the stable door; Carlo, Mr. Dunning's old dog, is lying in the shade of the wood heap; Hannah is placing her spotlessly clean milk-pans in a row under the dairy window; and Susan, screened by the over-luxuriant foliage of a pear-tree, is watching the scene complacently from her bedroom.

'I must go in and order dinner now,' Mrs. Wynburn says, observing that Hannah's dairy work is done. 'Will you go in and rest, Jessie; or would you rather stay out of doors till I have done my housekeeping?'

'Oh, I would much rather stay out of doors, Mary dear! I will go into the garden, or perhaps down the paddock to the beck-side.'

As Mrs. Wynburn walked away her friend stood by the hencoop watching her. 'I don't quite understand you, Mary,' she thought; 'you are not your old self.' And then Miss Macdonald went through the door that led from the yard to the garden, and sat down on a

low wall by the cucumber-frame. Her thoughts of the little friend who was so dear to her were by no means satisfactory.

How graceful Miss Macdonald looked sitting there in her straw hat and long gray cloak! She was tall, very tall, but her figure was so lithe and graceful that no one could think her unusual height anything but an advantage. And then she was so stately—not with a stateliness like Sophie's, born of physical strength and beauty, and a rather uncommon form of pride—but with a gentle, thoughtful serenity of manner that spoke eloquently of the strength and exaltation of the soul within. The same meaning shone from the depths of her clear gray eyes, and was visible in the chastened yet winning expression of her face, giving to her pale complexion and regular features a power of fascination that was almost irresistible.

Half an hour afterwards, when Mrs. Wynburn went down the paddock with her apron full of books and work, she found her friend sitting on a rough little seat that old James had just put up under one of the trees.

'Hasn't he chosen a charming spot?' Miss Macdonald said, as the old man went off with his tools. 'Close to the hut, so that you could step in there if a shower of rain came on, and just within sight

and sound of that noisy little beck. He could not have found a better place.'

'I am rather afraid that Sophie will think it would have been better *not* quite so near to the beck. She says that the sound of the water makes her feel deaf and stupid.'

'Or what you would call dreamy.'

Mrs. Wynburn smiled. It was pleasant to have her little weaknesses brought to light and laughed at by Jessie Macdonald again. It brought back the remembrance of the old times—of days when it had been her one earthly relief to tell her cares and troubles to Jessie, and be soothed and uplifted by such words of peace and comfort as can only come with power from a heart that has suffered and struggled and overcome. The atmosphere of those days seemed to be round her again this fresh June morning, and books and work were alike unheeded as she sat, with her hand in Jessie's, thinking of the past.

They sat in silence for some time—that pleasant silence which is 'more eloquent than words,' and which can only be indulged in as a pleasure by people who are very close to each other in heart.

Presently Miss Macdonald spoke. Her thoughts had also been of her friend, but they had been in the present tense more than in the past.

'Where is Sophie this morning?' she inquired.

‘ She has gone with Eliza and Georgie Stapleton to a rehearsal at the concert-room. The Philharmonic Society is going to give a concert for the benefit of the widow and orphans of the man who was killed on the line last week.’

‘ Is it an amateur society ?’

‘ Yes. The Stapletons belong to it, and they wished Sophie to join, but she declined.’

‘ Did she ? She has a very beautiful voice. I heard her singing in the drawing-room when I was walking on the lawn last evening.’

‘ You would hear her to advantage then : she never sings so well as when she is quite alone.’

Gradually the conversation led from the brilliancy of Sophie’s accomplishments to the peculiarities of her character. Mrs. Wynburn was longing for the sympathy, the consolation, that had been so precious in the old days, but she did not seek it now. With pardonable pride she joined in her friend’s praises of Sophie’s beauty and cleverness ; dwelt on her strength of principle, her self-command, her unflinching courtesy of manner, and acknowledged that she appeared to have inherited something of her grandfather’s reserve and self-reliance ; but she made no confession or complaint.

But as Mrs. Browning has said, and with truth,

‘ Eyes that have wept so much, see clear ;’

and as Miss Macdonald watched the mother-love grow visible in the expression of her friend's face, and then die out suddenly, as if darkened by remembrance, the smile which had been playing on her own lips faded out in unconscious sympathy. She had seen the shadow of the cross that Mary Wynburn was bearing.

CHAPTER II.

THE PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY'S CONCERT.

JESSIE MACDONALD thought she had never seen Sophie look so beautiful as she did when she came downstairs dressed for the concert. Her toilet—a plain gray silk dress, a small cloak of white cashmere, and a graceful wreath of jessamine and violets twined in her hair—was perfectly simple and girl-like, and yet she looked and moved like a queen.

‘Do you know whether my mother is ready yet?’ she inquired of Miss Macdonald.

‘Yes, dear, she is quite ready. She has just gone into the kitchen to give Hannah some directions about Mr. Dunning's tea.’

Sophie went into the study.

‘Grandfather, I have come to see if I can persuade you to change your mind now. I assure you I am

speaking quite honestly when I say that I shall be just as happy here with you as at the concert.'

'No, Sophia. As you know, I change my mind very rarely; I shall certainly not change it now. Your mother has been here twice making an offer similar to yours, and I have given her the same answer.'

'Then I had better say good-night now.'

'Good-night, Sophia. God bless you!'

According to previous arrangement, the Fentons had engaged a cab to bring them down from Heather Brow to the concert-room; and when Mr. Fenton had seen his wife safely through the mysterious labyrinth of back-stairs and passages that led to the curtained space behind the platform, he returned to the cab, and went on to the Vicarage for Mrs. and Miss Wynburn and their guest.

But Mr. Fenton was rather behind the time agreed upon. The concert-room was already well filled when the party from the Vicarage arrived; but, having taken tickets for the reserved seats, they were spared the unpleasant difficulty of struggling for places. The room was a good-sized one, well lighted, and prettily decorated. The people were most of them well dressed, and apparently happily disposed. Anticipation of some kind, varying from mild expectation to enthusi-

astic eagerness, was visible on every face; and, judging from the programme, and taking into consideration the admitted talent of some of the members of the Philharmonic Society, it did not seem probable that any reasonable expectations of an enjoyable evening would be disappointed.

Five minutes past eight: the room is crowded by this time. The back seats are growing impatient, and uneasy little showers of boot-heels and walking-sticks are beginning to come down upon the floor. The people who have been studying the programme since a quarter-past seven are beginning to know it by heart; and those who have no programme are a little tired of looking at the blue and gold decorations that ornament the arch above the unoccupied platform.

But the green curtain moves, a slight opening is made, and the tall thin figure of Mr. Moss, the conductor, appears in the opening. The appearance of Mr. Moss is the signal for violent demonstration. He bows magnificently, retires, and returns with a lady.

The quaint-looking lady, in amber moire-antique and black lace, who is led by Mr. Moss to one of the chairs in front of the platform, is Lady Anna Cliffhurst. Vehement applause greets Lady Anna, who is well known in Cornborough.

Another burst of applause; the second lady is Mrs. Fenton. Tall, blonde, youthful, and elegant:

toilette of mauve silk and white lace, most elaborate and expansive. Mrs. Fenton plays composedly with her fan, and smiles very pleasantly at her friend Lady Anna.

Two other ladies are led by Mr. Moss to the front of the platform—a stout, red-haired lady, in a cloud of emerald green tarlatane, and a young lady in white muslin. These four are the principal lady soloists.

The others take their places behind and at the sides with less ceremony. There is much scraping of violins and arranging of music-books, much impatient coughing among the audience, some decided little raps upon the desk from Mr. Moss's bâton, and the concert begins.

The first part of the programme consisted of 'Selections from Haydn's Creation.' The choruses were applauded, and the solos encored in the most encouraging manner. Then came the usual 'interval of ten minutes,' during which the nervously-delighted amateurs disappeared behind the green curtain, there to partake of some needful refreshments, and to praise each other's performances in a manner worthy of the most energetic mutual admiration society.

Again the platform became radiant with bright eyes, blushing faces, smiling lips, and gay dresses. Again Mr. Moss's bâton was heard tapping the desk,

and the symphony heading the second part of the programme, and the glee which followed, were given and received most satisfactorily.

After the glee, Eliza and Georgie Stapleton sat down to the grand piano to play a duet. Georgie perceived that her sister was hysterical, and that she was on the verge of breaking down. 'Don't be idiotic,' whispered Georgie. Eliza grew red and angry, and played more brilliantly than she had ever been known to play before.

As Eliza and Georgie went back to their places, one Mr. Crathorne, a slim, fair-haired lawyer's clerk, stepped forward to the front of the platform. Nothing nervous in the manner or movements of the elegant Mr. Edwin D. Crathorne.

Two years previously this gentleman had spent some time in London; and during his stay there he had heard Mr. Sims Reeves sing 'Adelaide.' Since that time it had been Mr. Crathorne's most cherished ambition to sing 'Adelaide' on the platform of the Cornborough Concert Room. This ambition was about to be gratified.

But, unfortunately, there was something in the appearance of Mr. Crathorne that excited the risible faculties of the good people of Cornborough. Some smothered bursts of laughter were heard in the gallery. Laughter is contagious, and before Mr.

Crathorne had quite assumed the attitude he had been studying for so many past weeks, he was greeted with a storm of derisive applause that would have utterly unnerved a less obtuse vocalist. But Mr. Crathorne was very obtuse. The idea that there was anything unreal in the welcome accorded to him did not enter his mind. He bowed and smiled, made signs to the lady who was about to accompany him to wait a moment, bowed and smiled again—the uproar grew tumultuous.

Mr. Crathorne began to feel uncomfortable. Was it *possible* that they were laughing at him? No, it couldn't be. He raised his eyeglass. The effect of this trivial act was unmistakable—they *were* laughing at him; but Mr. Crathorne was pachydermatous as well as obtuse.

Mr. Moss stepped forward. One steady look from the much-respected conductor all but subdued the boisterous outbreak, and, by a few well-chosen words, he secured for Mr. Crathorne the opportunity of singing 'Adelaide'; but much of Mr. Crathorne's self-confidence had had time to evaporate.

Between each verse of the song the same doubtful plaudits were bestowed upon the much-perplexed tenor. *Should* he bow his acknowledgments or not? He remembered Mr. Sims Reeves: he bowed. The audience was delighted.

At the close of the song Mr. Crathorne felt a little overcome, and would have retired behind the green curtain; but this was not to be thought of—the back seats encored Mr. Crathorne's 'Adelaide.'

But Mr. Crathorne could not remember that he had ever known Mr. Sims Reeves answer an encore. If his memory served him rightly, the distinguished tenor was in the habit of bowing three times in reply to each demand for repetition. Mr. Crathorne stepped forward a little, not quite to the front of the platform, and bowed three times in succession.

But before this ceremony was quite concluded, perspicacious Mr. Moss had led Lady Anna Cliffhurst to the piano, and ere the bewildered Mr. Crathorne could resume his place, the audience was listening attentively to the opening bars of Beethoven's 'Sonata in D Minor.' The sonata concluded, a four-part song followed, and then a rather wearisome 'quartet' was performed by the band.

'You are looking tired, mother,' Sophie said to Mrs. Wynburn, under cover of a deafening double-forte passage.

'Am I, dear? I don't feel tired in the least. I am enjoying myself very much. Are not you?'

'Yes, mother, thank you.'

'How do you like it all, Jessie?' Mrs. Wynburn said, turning to Miss Macdonald.

‘Very much indeed, Mary dear. *This* is a rather lengthy performance, but I suppose it is nearly over now? What follows next?’

Mrs. Wynburn looked at the programme.

“‘Douglas’—a song. . . . Miss G——. Who is Miss G——? Sophie, do you know?’

‘No, mother. There is no one on the platform whose name begins with G.’

When the quartet was concluded Mr. Moss disappeared for a moment. He returned leading a young lady by the hand—very young indeed she was, little more than a girl. She looked very pale, almost as white and rigid as marble; her hair was dark, her dress of the deepest mourning; the expression of her face, her whole appearance, was sad and touching beyond description. The question, ‘Why is she here?’ rose to the lips involuntarily.

Almost fascinated the audience seemed by the appearance of this frail girl, contrasting so strangely with everyone and everything around her—almost too spell-bound to do anything but whisper, ‘Who is she?’ The attempt to raise a little of the demonstration that had been showered so freely upon the others was an utter failure.

Mrs. Fenton sat down to the piano to accompany the stranger. She played the symphony; there was a moment’s pause, a moment’s effort, and then there

were heard the tones of a voice that sent a thrill of emotion to the core of almost every heart in the room. It was a weird, unearthly voice; there was something plaintive and beseeching in it; it was a cry of pain from a soul that seemed to be bearing more than it could endure—bearing a burden that it could never hope to be released from in this world, and bearing it not well. The first words of the song :

‘ Could ye come back to me, Douglas ! Douglas !
In the old likeness that I knew,
I would be so faithful, so loving, Douglas,
Douglas ! Douglas ! tender and true ’

—these simple words were touching, but they did not express half the meaning of the eerie cry that seemed to supplicate so passionately and yet so hopelessly. The wild cadence of a voice like that could find no adequate utterance in words.

Mary Wynburn sat pale, silent, and shivering. Her very soul was stirred. The old wounds began to bleed, the new to quiver with fresh pain; and when that wailing voice had sung the verse beginning :

‘ Oh, to call back the days that are not ! ’

and the next :

‘ I was not half worthy of you, Douglas ;
Not half worthy the like of you, ’

the widow laid her cold tiny hand in that of her

friend quietly and silently, but with a painful look in her eyes that was pitiful to see. Jessie caressed the little hand, and bent her head to hide her own tears.

‘Be a brave little woman, Mary darling,’ she whispered.

Mary was brave—almost too brave. When the strange singer was gone from the platform she looked up, her face began to flush, her eye to brighten; the band played a deafening, stirring chorus, and Mrs. Wynburn began to talk of indifferent things in a quick, ceaseless way that went to Jessie’s heart more keenly than the most passionate burst of tears would have done. Once before Miss Macdonald had seen her friend like this—only once.

The national anthem was sung at last, cloaks and shawls were arranged, and the cab containing the Vicarage party was driven quickly down Priorsgate. Mr. and Mrs. Fenton were with them; Mrs. Wynburn had insisted that they should not go back to Heather Brow supperless.

‘How unusually cheerful our little hostess was to-night,’ Mr. Fenton said to his wife as they drove along the edge of Cornborough Moor. ‘Going to the concert has done her good. I have always thought that a little more society would be beneficial to her.’

Mrs. Fenton smiled.

‘I thought you had had more penetration, Marcus,’ she said.

‘Penetration, Cecile! What is there to penetrate in the fact of a lady’s being a little more animated than usual after a concert?’

‘Mrs. Wynburn’s animation was not natural, dear; indeed, I thought once she seemed quite tremulous with excitement;’ and then Mrs. Fenton’s languid voice became more full of meaning than usual. ‘I am certain our little friend is either not so strong or not so happy as she used to be. I have been watching her some time, and when Miss Macdonald goes away I mean to try to persuade her to come to Heather Brow more frequently than she has done.’

‘Do, Cecile dear. How thoughtful you always are!’

CHAPTER III.

GOOD COUNSEL.

THE Fentons had been gone some time. The old clock in the church-tower struck twelve—twelve solemn deep-sounding strokes. The bells chimed a slow, haunting, monotonous hymn-tune. A summer night-wind sighed drearily through the trees, sweeping the heavy branches to and fro upon the moss-grown

roof. A wan-looking moon sailed slowly through the sky, its rays shedding a chequered light through the dark leafy boughs, upon the garden paths, upon the front of the sombre old house, through the high, narrow staircase window, upon the landing, upon the stairs, through the open window of Miss Macdonald's room, gleaming fitfully everywhere through the quivering boughs of the trees that stirred in the summer night-wind.

The chimes had ceased. Miss Macdonald was sitting on a low chair by the side of her bed, watching the moonlight flitting across the carpet, listening to the hollow sound of the old clock ticking in the hall—to the slight, suppressed sobs of the little friend at her knee, and thinking prayerfully what she could say to comfort one whose sorrow was only half known to her.

'Mary, darling,' she said at last, folding her arms round the frail little figure with motherly tenderness—'Mary, my own little friend, tell me what troubles you. Talk to me as you used to do in the old days.'

'Oh, Jessie, Jessie! you will think me very weak. I *am* weak—weaker now than I have ever been, for the strength of my last hope is gone from me.'

'That can hardly be, dear,' Miss Macdonald said in a gentle, quiet voice.

'No, not *that* hope, Jessie—but for that I could not

have endured so long. But oh, Jessie, Jessie—my sister Jessie! even that hope is growing dim; it seems so far off. My very soul is blinded, darkened; I can see nothing, think of nothing, but my bitter sorrow. Oh, why was I ever a wife and a mother?

‘You are alluding to Sophie, dear. Am I right?’

‘Yes, Jessie; but don’t blame me. She is all I have, and I had hoped so long—hoped for a life so different from this. I am wrong, I know—my heart is full of wrong thoughts and bitterness: but I have suffered so much, Jessie—oh, so much!—more than I can ever tell you.’

Miss Macdonald was silent for awhile. She was pained, surprised. During all the years that she had known Mrs. Wynburn—years of deep sorrow, some of them—she had never before seen her like this; never before heard from her lips any words but those that spoke of a submission and a resignation that was almost touching; her simple, child-like faith had been almost wondrous in one so tried. Remembering this, it seemed strange that what appeared to be a comparatively slight trouble should have power to dim the faith that had been so long unclouded.

‘But it can only be dimmed,’ Jessie said to herself; ‘it can never be darkened.’

And then Miss Macdonald wondered if it would be possible for her to do anything to lighten her friend’s

burden—if she might dare to make any attempt to influence Sophie herself ; but she had been too observant to have any hope of success. She had seen, with surprise at first, how outwardly calm and self-controlled Mrs. Wynburn's love for her child was. No exigence in it, no demonstrativeness ; nothing but a gentle, patient cheerfulness, and an unvarying and evident self-repression that had been unintelligible at first. But, getting to know Sophie better, seeing how she shrunk from the touch of a gentle hand, how impatiently she winced at the sound of a tender, loving word, how coldly she received her mother's one kiss morning and evening, she had come to understand it more clearly ; but she had never dreamed of such a depth of hidden grief as this.

A little longer yet Jessie Macdonald was silent. Then she spoke :

'Mary, my darling, rest your head here in my arms, and lie very quiet and listen to me. Don't think I cannot understand you. I am not a mother, and perhaps I cannot *quite* enter into the depth and intensity of such mother-love as yours ; but I can feel that the pain you are suffering is a real one, and that it is real must be a comfort to you. Real sorrow is never sent undesignedly.'

'No, Jessie, I know that'—the sobs had ceased, and the plaintive little voice was quiet now—'I know

that, and it seems as if my sin was all the greater because I do know it. I have always felt that trouble has never been sent to me aimlessly ; but oh, Jessie, what a great deal of sorrow-teaching I must have needed !'

'But have you not always felt, dear, that the teaching has been of exactly the kind you needed most ?'

'Not always, Jessie—not quite always. I try to think so, and to believe what I think ; but I cannot always feel it. I could not when Louis went away ; I cannot now.'

'I think I can understand why, Mary dear. . . . But may not even natural affection need a chastening hand if there is danger of its becoming inordinate ?'

'Jessie, Jessie ! *can* a mother's love for her child be inordinate ?'

Miss Macdonald stooped and kissed the little face, that looked so wan and wistful in the moonlight.

'I think it can, dear ; but don't misunderstand me. I know that love—love of some kind—is the strongest instinct of human nature ; strongest in the highest natures that can enjoy the fulfilment of cherished hopes most keenly, and feel the chills of disappointment most acutely. But, Mary, my own friend, my sister, I need not tell you that there is only One—

One Perfect Love—that can give back such love as yours faithfully and unchangingly—ay, unchangingly, a word that can hardly be applied with truth to any human love that ever existed.’

Mrs. Wynburn was silent for awhile, then she said sadly :

‘ Jessie, that Love was nearer to me once than it is now. Where light and warmth was I feel cold and darkness. I read, I pray—I do everything I did then ; but nothing brings the same comfort, the same peace. All is unrest, and desolation, and pain. Why is it, Jessie—why ?’

‘ I think you have told me why, Mary dear. If, as you said, you can see nothing, think of nothing, but your sorrow, you will find no rest or peace in that. I can speak from experience, you know, dear ; for I too have known what it is to feel as if life was darkened and clouded, as if prayer was unheard and useless, and as if God had turned away His face for ever. But I learnt—and it was a difficult lesson—that

“ Sin *only* hides the genial ray,
And round the Cross makes night of day.”

It was nothing but sin, earth-bound thoughts and selfish sorrow—the “ sorrow of the world that worketh death.” . . . Oh, Mary, darling ! it will be hard for you to try to give up such hopes, such love as yours ; to have to see and feel close to you every day the

cold, unsatisfying shadow of what might have been ; but you must do it, dear—you must turn from your broken cisterns to living fountains. You may not feel that you have sufficient strength for such keen renunciation at first ; but, “ask, and it shall be given you ;” “seek, and ye shall find ;” and seek until you do find, Mary dear—the very act will bring relief. Do try to pray more—more earnestly. Nothing else will give such peace ; nothing else so still the longing, craving pain that so often comes over the soul ; nothing else so change disquiet and unrest into perfect calmness. Take all to God : what cannot be taken to Him must be banished from the heart and mind and soul entirely—banished with a watchful, strong, unyielding will. Take all else to Him ; take it in the prayer of faith ; take it to the foot of the Cross, and pray to Him who hung thereon to plead for you, and to give you strength to suffer and endure with Him.’

* * * * *

‘Jessie, my true friend, I will try ; and it seems as if it would all be so easy to-night : as if I could begin afresh and forget all the past—forget everything but that love which is “Life’s only sign.” But I know that I shall not go on feeling like this—I know I shall feel weak and powerless when I come to try my strength in the actual battle of daily life.’

‘That will be almost as you choose, dear. You need never fight the battle of life alone. It may be that—

“Only the Lord can hear,
Only the Lord can see
The struggle within how dark and drear,
Though quiet the outside be.”

But the “battle-clouds” can never prevail so long as He is near. It may be a hard struggle for you, my little one, but don’t give it up; it must be made. . . . Life—the true life—is strangely within our own power; we may make or mar our happiness not only in this world, but in the world to come. We have help and strength, and light and guidance given; but there is much left for the exercise of human will and reason. “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life”—that is where you must begin, Mary. Try to bring every thought into subjection; to change the whole current of your inner life; to wrench the too deeply-planted roots of affection from the barren, stony, wayside earth, to which they have clung so long, and plant them in higher, purer ground. It is difficult work, exhausting work—work that requires a clear insight into what is to be effected by it—strong determination, and patience under repeated failure. It must be well begun—begun by earnest prayer; by long

and deep meditation; by consideration of the good to be gained; of the evil to be cast out; of the light to be sought; of the darkness to be shunned; of the effect of failure and of success; and of the end of all, when the final account must be rendered.'

The two friends stood by the window. The night was far advanced; the moon shed a calm light over the graves in the peaceful little churchyard below; faint streaks of dawnlight were visible over a distant hill seen through an opening in the trees; and the last faint sweep of the summer night-wind went sighing drearily away over the barren moor.

Mrs. Wynburn was watching her friend—almost awestruck by the strange, solemn light that shone in her eyes.

'Jessie,' she said softly, 'what are you thinking of?'

'I was thinking of another night, dear, and of another grave—that grave that was in the hillside garden so long ago. . . . And wondering, if we had lived then, if we could have gone there, and if it would have been possible for us to steal round unseen by the Roman soldiers, to stand before that sealed stone in the still moonlight, to think of all that day's sad, bitter anguish; and of His agony—His awful agony the night before. And thinking that if we

could have looked but once on that calm, dead face on which the mocking Jews had looked with such angry scorn; if we had seen on that forehead the marks of the cruel crown of thorns; if we had dared to kneel down—to kneel very low, and touch for one instant that cold, dead, wounded hand—wounded for us, for our transgressions, surely we should never, never have walked in the shadow of sin or earth-born sorrow again.'

CHAPTER IV.

OLD HANNAH.

MISS MACDONALD went away; the summer passed on; the hay-making was over; the harvest-waggons began to move slowly along the fields and lanes in the neighbourhood of Cornborough. The school was closed for the harvest-holidays; the children were gleaning in the fields. The leaves began to redden and fall; the purple bloom of the heather grew darker; the green bracken faded into hues of bright bronze and yellow. The days grew shorter, the evenings longer and cooler, and the sunsets so brilliant and glowing that the distant hills on the western side of the moor rose up like islets on 'a sea of glass mingled with fire.'

For some weeks past, Mr. Fenton, Mrs. Wynburn and Sophie had been trying to induce Mr. Dunning to consent to the re-establishment of the annual school-feast. For eleven long years no such festival had been held at Cornborough, and some most cogent reasons in favour of the neglected custom had been brought forward.

After much effort, a conditional consent had been elicited from Mr. Dunning. The feast was not to be held until the last harvest-field in the neighbourhood was gleaned, the school re-opened, and a written statement of the progress and conduct of each child who had attended the Sunday or week-day school during the past year submitted to his inspection.

Mr. Fenton had reminded him that, the harvest being generally so late in these Northern regions, it would be impossible to count with any degree of certainty upon an afternoon fine and warm enough for an outdoor tea. Mrs. Wynburn had expressed some doubts as to the true wisdom of the plan of admitting to the school-feast only those children whose conduct could be made to look well on paper. On this point Mr. Fenton and Sophie had agreed with Mr. Dunning; and Mrs. Wynburn, finding herself one against three, had grown rather eager in her vindication of small sinners.

‘Those who have been guilty of faults that have

been thought unpardonable have been expelled from the school,' she urged; 'the smaller offenders are punished at the time. And, if you would consider the nature of their misdeeds, and then remember what kind of homes, and parents, and elder brothers and sisters some of them have, surely you would not think of making a day that would be to many of them the one great day of pleasure in the year—a day that they would look forward to and backward to with an intensity of delight that we cannot understand—surely you would not turn it into a day of punishment and disgrace? Do think of the hardening, embittering effect it will have, not only upon the children, but upon their parents and friends, perhaps for years to come. Oh, I cannot tell you either what I feel or what I mean; but, before you decide upon a standard of conduct, do ask yourselves how it will look in the eyes of Him who "lifted up Himself and said, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone."'

Mr. Dunning had agreed to reconsider the matter. He would still have the statement prepared by Miss Couchley, revised by Mr. Fenton, and inspected by himself; but he would not decide at present how far it should be used as a test. Mr. Fenton adhered to his original opinion. Sophie, whose ideas on the subject of reward and punishment were peculiar and

decided, grew irate, made one or two sharply satirical speeches, and concluded by saying that, had her mother been a special pleader, she thought she should have rather enjoyed being 'prisoner at the bar.'

Some heavy rains had fallen, the harvest had been delayed; and it was not until the last week in September that Mr. Dunning could be brought to decide upon the day when the school-feast should be held. He had named the first Tuesday in October.

Much to the delight of everyone concerned, the autumn morning was a glorious one. Calm and cool, yet sunny and bright. The leaves that were still on the trees were all glowing with red and yellow; a few brilliant autumn flowers remained in the borders; the evergreens glistened in the sun; and the little beck, swollen by the late rains, was rushing down from the moors to the sea with all the noise and haste that would-be-important things and people make in the world generally.

After breakfast Mrs. Wynburn went into the kitchen. The sun streamed in through the trees, through the ivy that clung closely round the stone-mullioned windows, flickering on the old oak dresser, on the quaint dinner-service—crimson and green on a straw-coloured ground—on the dish-covers that hung over old James's chair, and on the curiously painted

door-panels of the corner cupboard. Marvellous must have been the ideas of the artist who painted the red and blue, and green and yellow 'Finding of Moses' on the convex panels of that cupboard-door.

The kitchen was not quite so tidy as usual this morning. Extra work was going on : baking of cakes and biscuits, washing of rarely-used glass and china, and cleaning of antique silver. Susan was bright and elated ; Betsy Morris, who had come in to help, was brisk and fussy ; and, to Mrs. Wynburn's surprise, poor old Hannah, who on such occasions was always either very cross or very jocosely, seemed in a state of great depression of spirits.

'Are you not well to-day, Hannah?' Mrs. Wynburn asked as they crossed the yard together to look at the baskets of buns and loaves that were standing in the dairy.

'Yes, ma'am, ah'm weel anuff, thank ya,' said Hannah sadly.

'But you don't seem like yourself. Do tell me if anything troubles you.'

'It's the trouble 'at's te come yet 'at lies heavy, Mrs. Wynburn ; but doän't you be askin' na questions. What is ta be, will be.'

'There is no doubt of that, Hannah,' said Mrs. Wynburn, who had some knowledge of the old

woman's prescient moods, 'but even "what is to be" will not come any quicker for my knowing it.'

'Mebbe not, ma'am, mebbe not; but ah'd as lief ya didn't hear o' evil fra me.'

Very sad and subdued old Hannah was, and there was a settled conviction in her voice and manner that was impressive. It was not a rare thing to find her dispirited by an unusual dream, an omen, or a presentiment; the mysterious side of nature had great attractions for Hannah. On winter nights, by the kitchen fire, she would perplex old James and amuse Susan by the hour together with legends and charms, stories of bahrgeists and haunted houses, wonderful dreams that had come true, and ill-luck that people had brought upon themselves by neglecting certain little ceremonies propitiatory to the maleficent powers; but it was seldom that she was so really self-oppressed as she was to-day.

By slow degrees, however, she unfolded the cause. Mrs. Wynburn had changed the subject, but Hannah inconsistently returned to it.

'I knaw ya will nobbut laugh,' she said, 'but heaven send 'at there may be na tears te shed.'

Then the old woman told her story. The previous evening she had been standing on the step of the kitchen-door; quite late, she said it was, and she had gone out to look at the stars before going to bed, to

see what kind of weather they were likely to have for the school-feast. As she stood, thinking how cloudy it was, and what evident signs of change were apparent, Carlo came up to her; she began stroking him, and suddenly, right overhead, far away up above the house and the trees, they heard the wild shrill unearthly yelping of the 'Gabriel Hounds.' The dog heard it too, she said, for he shivered and trembled under her hand as if stricken with terror. There was nothing to be seen. The young moon was only just rising through watery clouds, and the stars were few and faint. There was no wind, no other sound—nothing but the ominous cries of the spectral pack as they went rushing on through the distant sky.

Old Hannah's face had grown ashy-gray as she told her story; but when she looked up and saw the merry smile on Mrs. Wynburn's face, her poor old withered cheeks flushed crimson with anger and disappointment.

'Weel, weel, Miss Mary' (Mrs. Wynburn was always 'Miss Mary' in Hannah's heart), 'may ya allus hev as little cause to greet as ya hev just noo. Ah hevn't lived my threescoöre years withoot sorrow, nor yet withoot warnin' o' sorrow; an' them flyin' hounds niver yet passed ower the hoose ah lived in, but trouble, or sickness, or death came in at the doör.'

'You dear, silly old woman,' Mrs. Wynburn said,

taking Hannah's hard brown hand in hers; 'why, there are few sounds I like to hear better than those very cries you speak of. Did no one ever tell you what they really are? the shrill notes of the wild-fowl that pass over us every autumn in their passage to the southern countries where they spend the winter! Oh, Hannah, Hannah, how have you ever got through the world at all with so many superstitions clinging to you?'

Hannah shook her head very mournfully as Mrs. Wynburn went away smiling to finish Janey Smith's frock, and put tickets on the numerous articles that filled the prize-basket.

'There's no makin' foälks see if they shut their eyes,' the poor old creature said sadly.

PART III.

'Before the curing of a strong disease,
Even in the instant of repair and health,
The fit is strongest; evils that take leave
On their departure most of all show evil.'

SHAKESPEARE: *King John*, Act iii., Scene 4.

CHAPTER I.

THE CORNBOROUGH SCHOOL-FEAST.

At precisely a quarter to three, Jemima Ellen Brown—Miss Couchley's assistant—is seen coming down

Priorsgate. Jemima is wearing her Sunday hat—a deeply sunburnt Tuscan straw, with a new pale primrose ribbon on it; her Sunday jacket of black silk, and a new print dress, very stiff, very bright blue, and trimmed with broad white braid in amazing quantities. Jemima looks radiant and conscious.

With much effort she makes her way through the playground, through crowds of bright-faced children in holiday attire. Each child carries a mug tied in a pocket-handkerchief, generally a pink-and-white handkerchief with pictures and verses printed on it. Jemima unlocks the school door, rings the bell; the children enter noisily, but become impressed on seeing the decorations. Miss Couchley appears in a pink muslin of decided pattern, blue feathers, and flaxen ringlets. The children take their places in the desks. Order and silence reign.

Very pretty the school-room looks. Brightly illuminated texts decorate the walls; long festoons of evergreens surround the maps, the pictures, and the clock. Some merry-minded sprite has bent the cane into a circle, wreathed it with ivy, and hung it over Miss Couchley's chair. There are a few bright flowers in baskets and vases on the desk and the mantel-piece. And the prize-basket—the centre round which much of the interest of the day circles—stands on the work-table, close to the harmonium.

Presently the door opens, the children rise, Mr. and Mrs. Fenton, Mrs. Wynburn and Sophie enter. Miss Couchley grows very pink, talks very fast, and her flaxen curls flutter more distressfully than ever when Mr. Fenton presents her formally with a gilt-edged volume bound in green. Her thanks are profuse, and she puts it carefully away in her desk without looking at the title.

Again the door opens, and more visitors appear. Mrs. Stapleton, Eliza, and Georgie; Mr. Stevenson Baxter and Mr. Samuel Wood, churchwardens; a few Sunday-school teachers; and perhaps twenty or thirty of the parents and friends of the children.

At a sign from Mr. Fenton, Miss Couchley sits down to the harmonium, a hymn is sung, a short service read, Mr. Fenton gives a little lecture—simple, concise, and to the purpose—then the business of the day begins.

The prizes in the basket—consisting of frocks, pinafores, work-bags, and aprons for the girls; books, muffetees, and woollen comforters for the boys—are spread out on the table by Miss Couchley. Each article has a ticket on it, bearing the name and allusion to the most prominent virtue of the child for whom it is intended. Mr. Fenton looks nervous, clears his throat, glances at the list in his hand: 'Number one,' he says to Miss Couchley in a whisper;

Miss Couchley hands to him a pretty little work-bag, made of holland, trimmed with scarlet braid, and fitted up with needles, and cotton, and tape, and scissors.

'Maria Smith, a reward for industry,' Mr. Fenton reads aloud from the ticket.

Maria, blushing and curtsying, walks up to the table, receives her prize, and goes back to her seat.

Mr. Fenton crosses out 'number one,' and goes through the list with less diffidence.

The last prize disappears from the table. Seven little faces look blank, fourteen little hands are empty. Miss Couchley looks reproachfully at the map of Africa; Mrs. Wynburn says a few kind words to a disappointed mother—both are sorely tempted to indulge in thoughts of private compensation.

Then a procession is formed in the playground. The children walk in pairs; the teachers arrange themselves here and there along the line; a few gay banners are unfurled and flutter in the rising breeze; the sky is looking gray and cloudy, but very sunny are the little faces that pass two by two through the Vicarage gates.

It is just half-past four by the church clock. Eight long tables in the paddock and three on the lawn are spread with cakes, and buns, and fruit, and flowers. The parents and children take their places promis-

cuously. James, Betsy Morris, and Susan appear with huge jugs of tea. Half a dozen junior teachers and senior scholars volunteer to act as waitresses, and are despatched to the dairy for baskets of cake. The people who have arrived at the Vicarage during the giving of the prizes emerge from the dining and drawing rooms and try to make themselves useful. Mrs. Stapleton places herself at the head of one of the tables on the lawn; Eliza offers to preside at a second; Mrs. Dennison takes a third. Lady Anna Cliffhurst, and Mrs. Fenton, Mrs. Wynburn, and the two Miss Lythams, Georgie Stapleton, Ella Dennison, and Sophie take their places at the tables in the paddock. The tea is ready to be poured out; the owners of the little mugs look expectant. James crosses the paddock, glances for a moment at each table, walks quickly back to the house, and reappears behind Mr. Dunning's bath-chair. Mr. Cliffhurst insists on three cheers for the Vicar of Cornborough.

One moment's silence. The people remain standing. With the help of old James, Mr. Dunning rises in his chair, takes off his hat; other hats are raised; grace is sung. The next hour is a very pleasant one.

Once more the sun gleams out through the clouds. Slanting rays fall through the trees, upon the white table-covers, the gay china, the plates of fruit sur-

rounded by flowers and evergreens that Sophie and Susan have arranged with so much taste. Bright ribbons and gay dresses flit actively about amongst the tables. Much laughing and chattering is heard amongst the little ones. The plates are emptied and quickly refilled; the tea-jugs can hardly be replenished fast enough. Mr. Fenton, Mr. Cliffhurst, and others are looking after everything and everybody; handing baskets of buns and plates of fruit to the fathers, and mothers, and children, who are enjoying the long-omitted feast very heartily. Everything is going on well—well enough to satisfy even the anxious little lady in deep mourning who sits smiling and chatting at one of the lowest tables in the paddock.

Tea is almost over. Miss Couchley's pink muslin flutters close to Mrs. Wynburn. Miss Couchley is in distress—such great distress that her mild blue eyes fill with tears when she tries to speak.

'I wanted to see you alone, if I could just for a moment, please, ma'am,' she says tremblingly.

Mrs. Wynburn rises from her chair, asks one of a group of young ladies who are standing near to take her place, and turns into the laurel-walk with the silly little schoolmistress.

'What is it that troubles you, Miss Couchley?' she inquires gently.

'Oh, it's only those children at the gate, Mrs.

Wynburn; there are three of them! There were seven that had no prizes, you know; five of the seven were not to come to tea, and three of the five are standing in the road looking through the gate. One is that big girl, Mary Ann Matson. She is not a good girl, I know, but she has been ill, and she has no father, and her mother is never sober; and oh, Mrs. Wynburn! she looks so white and hungry that I felt as if my tea was choking me. I don't know whether it was Mr. Dunning or Mr. Fenton who crossed the five names out of the list; they are all bad children, I know, but I cannot bear to see them standing there. Could you not do something, ma'am? Might I give them a bun each? Or *would* you ask Mr. Dunning to let them come into the grounds after tea? I don't think he would refuse if he saw them.'

They had reached the top of the laurel-walk by this time, and Mrs. Wynburn could see the little outcasts herself. Mary Ann Matson, with an infant sister in her arms, was standing close to the gate; she turned and curtsied when she saw Mrs. Wynburn, and her wan thin face and hungry, wistful eyes lit up as if a sudden glow of hope, that was almost certainty, had flashed into her mind. Two other beseeching little faces were pressed close to the bars, watching the distribution of good things within, and listening to the sounds of mirth and enjoyment.

Mrs. Wynburn turned down the walk again. 'She must do something: what would be the best thing to do?' Whilst she was pondering this question she heard the concluding grace sung; the bustle of 'clearing away' began. 'I will go and speak to Mr. Dunning,' she said to Miss Couchley.

But Mr. Dunning's chair was surrounded by a group of people: the Cliffhursts, and the Fentons, and Sophie. Mrs. Wynburn waited awhile; collected a number of children for blindman's-buff at the lower end of the lawn, organized some other games in the paddock, and had the satisfaction of seeing Lady Anne and Miss Fenton join in the fun eagerly. Mrs. Wynburn went back to the terrace. Mr. Fenton and Sophie were still there, and so was Mr. Cliffhurst. Mrs. Wynburn was rather glad to see the latter. 'I can count upon him as an ally,' she thought; but the widow's face had a communicative look: Mr. Cliffhurst placed a chair for her and walked away.

It was no use waiting for courage; Mrs. Wynburn began at once. She told her story very simply, and asked her father if his decision was irrevocable. She spoke very quietly: there was nothing whatever of pathos in her voice: even her words were not of a pleading nature; but there was no mistaking the undertone of eagerness, or the earnest, compassionate look that was in her blue-gray eyes.

Mr. Dunning listened to his daughter without making any remark, and then asked to see Miss Couchley. Miss Couchley was much excited, answered the Vicar's questions very quickly, very non-logically, and even forgot that she was supposed to be on good terms with Lindley Murray.

'If you would only see them, Mr. Dunning,' she concluded; 'there are three of them, you know there was five that wasn't to come to tea; it wouldn't be fair to let those three come in and not the others. If you will only let those come in and play awhile, and have something to eat, I will go up the town for the other two; and, oh, Mr. Dunning, I know those sort of children better than you can know them, and it will be ten times over more likely to make them good next year than if they are kept out like that. Please, sir, do think of it!'

Mr. Dunning looked thoughtful, Mr. Fenton amused, and Sophie angry.

'What do you think, Fenton?' Mr. Dunning said presently.

'I still retain my old opinion about the injustice of rewarding bad conduct; but in this case I am afraid it is almost impossible to hold out any longer. . . . I think I should leave it to Mrs. Wynburn to decide,' Mr. Fenton concluded with a smile.

Sophie turned away and went into the house.

After a little more deliberation Mr. Dunning's consent was given. Miss Couchley's thanks would have been overwhelming if the Vicar had not interrupted them.

'You will please take care that these children have some food, Miss Couchley; and some time—later in the evening—will you bring them to my study?'

Miss Couchley went up the town in search of the two other children; Mr. Fenton joined a group of young ladies who were playing croquet on the lawn; Mrs. Wynburn went into the dining-room to see if everything was properly arranged for the indoor tea.

Sophie was in the dining-room. She was standing near the window, looking into a dreary little corner of the churchyard. She made no sign when Mrs. Wynburn entered the room. The mother's heart sank a little.

'Sophie dear, you are not angry with me?' she said, laying her hand on her daughter's arm.

'I am angry with someone — with everyone, I think. I hate weakness, and I hate injustice. I am surrounded by both.'

'Sophie, you surprise me. There is neither weakness nor injustice in showing mercy to those poor little children. Do not get into a habit of looking at things in an exaggerated light, dear. Try and forget

it all just now, and come and help me : we shall not shine as hostesses if we remain here.'

' Are those children coming into the garden ?'

' Yes, dear ; but do try to see with your mother's eyes for once, there's a good child. Try to be extra kind to those poor little things ; you do not know how it may enable you to gain influence over them in the future.'

' Will you leave me, please, mother ? I wish to be alone.'

Mrs. Wynburn stood silent a moment, then she said sadly :

' Please don't speak to me so, darling ; don't make this evening an unhappy one.'

' I have no wish to make this evening or any other evening unhappy, but I acknowledge that I feel excessively annoyed. I think you have done more harm than you are probably aware of. It will be impossible to make those children whose conduct has been really good see any justice in what has been done ; and there are parents in the garden who will feel quite distressed at seeing their children in the company of such a girl as Mary Ann Matson. It will not bear thinking about. Do have the kindness to leave me, mother. Or—I beg your pardon, it is I who ought to leave the room.'

Very gracefully Sophie walked away ; very gently

she closed the door, and went up to her own room, with mingled feelings of anger and sadness and self-reproach. Mrs. Wynburn remained a few moments in the dining-room. She, too, was sad and self-distrustful.

‘I wonder whether I *have* been to blame?’ she thought to herself. ‘I am afraid I have only taken a one-sided view of the matter, after all. There is certainly both reason and common-sense in what Sophie says. Oh for that most excellent gift—“a right judgment in all things”! How I do fail, and make the same mistakes over and over again. And yet it is not always easy to know what is really right . . .’ Then the poor little woman—already beginning to feel physically weary—thought of her numerous guests, of the evening’s work before her, of the heavy gray cloud that seemed to have gathered suddenly over everything; and she sighed wearily as she counted the hours of effort that must pass before she could hope to have another chance of winning a kind word from her child. How she did long for one word—a word that would have changed all into sunlight again—but she went on her way as cheerfully as might be without it. There were no cloud-shadows on her face when she joined the children that were playing blindman’s-buff on the lawn.

* * * * *

That evening the sun went down in his grandest glory. Few of the visitors assembled at the Vicarage could remember ever having seen a sunset so brilliant. Brilliant it was, and yet awful. It was a sunset to be felt rather than seen and admired. It seemed to some of those who stood by the old gray church and the ancient tombstones as if there was strange and deep meaning in that wondrous, swiftly-changing sky.

Far away over valleys filled with golden haze, over fields and trees and farmhouses on sloping hillsides, beyond the level lines of moorland, beyond the shadowy hills—far away beyond and above all these spread a broad, glowing band of scarlet-orange, veined on the lower edge with lines of cold, glittering, greenish-yellow, and above with streaks of dazzling crimson. The upper sky was covered with dark blue-black clouds, flecked with crimson foam ; and against the northern horizon hung a heavy pall of lurid purple mist, shimmering into light as it neared the west, as if flames of living fire lay behind it, and deepening into cold blue-green shadows where it stretched away over the coast-line to the north-east.

Almost like a dream it seemed to those who stood in the churchyard, watching the last rays of light and colour fade into darkness. Rapidly the heavy purple clouds spread over the sky ; chill, fitful gusts of wind came sweeping up from the sea ; the leaves fluttered

from the trees. Lights began to gleam in the windows. The visitors went in to tea. The teachers and scholars sang glees and school-songs on the terrace by the dining-room window, sang heartily the National Anthem, sang sweetly and softly the Evening Hymn, and went home in the twilight. Old James and Betsy Morris stood near the gate with two large baskets between them, distributing buns and sweets to the children as they went out. Hannah—sad and silent—was looking everywhere, indoors and out, for Miss Sophie. Susan was very busy attending to the guests at the well-spread table in the dining-room. Mrs. Wynburn—her heart aching with pain and anxiety—was growing excitedly cheerful, talking and laughing and answering inquiries for Sophie with a nonchalance that gave rise to suspicion in the minds of one or two who were watching her, and knew her too well to be deceived.

Tea was over at last. The weather looked unpromising, and the visitors were anxious to be going. Mr. Dennison's carriage was announced, then Mr. Lytham's, and soon after the Cornborough people, provided with cloaks and shawls and umbrellas, went home. Last of all the Cliffhursts' carriage came round; they were going to drive home by Heather Brow and take Mr. and Mrs. Fenton with them.

'I should like to have stayed a little longer,' Lady

Anna said to Mrs. Wynburn as they stood in the dimly-lighted hall. 'I feel impertinently curious to know what that peculiar daughter of yours has been doing with herself all this time. I have not seen her this two hours.'

'I imagine—indeed, I feel almost certain—that she has gone up to the almshouses,' Mrs. Wynburn replied. 'Old Isaac Grant is ill, and she goes to sit and chat with him—or, rather, to listen to his quaint old stories—almost every day—she is sure to be there.'

'Shall we call and inquire?' Mrs. Fenton said; 'we have to pass the almshouses.'

'Oh no, thank you. If she does not come soon I shall send James up for her. It is not really late yet; only a quarter past eight.'

When Susan opened the hall-door a gust of wind drove the drizzling rain in the faces of those who were standing near; hats and cloaks were swept from the pegs, and went flying across the tiled pavement. The carriage-lamp twinkled outside, making 'darkness visible.' The last 'good-night' was said. The sound of the horses' feet and the rumbling wheels died away in the distance. All was still and silent, save the rush of the driving rain and the wild, stormy tossing of the wind among the trees.

CHAPTER II.

WAITING.

OLD James had come back from the almshouse. 'Isaac Grant had sent his respec's to Mrs. Wynburn; his rheumatiz was easier; an' he hadn't seen t' young laädy all t' daäy; he'd quite missed her like.' James had gone out again, taking a waterproof cloak, goloshes and umbrella this time. 'Miss Sophie off'n went te see Sally Cass,' he said; 'an' Sally's cottage was a good bit down t' Clayburn Road. Likely anuff Miss Sophie wad be stoppin' there for t' raäin te clear off; an' she'd hev a good spell o' waitin' if she waited there for fair weather.'

It was getting on towards half-past nine. Mrs. Wynburn had had a fire made in Sophie's room. She was sure to be glad of it this cold, wet night. It was burning brightly now, and the room was getting quite warm. Such a pretty little room it was, with its pale lilac paper, pink-and-white draperies, cheerful pictures on the walls, compact little bookcase—well-filled, and pretty feminine knick-knacks strewn about. 'Sophie's room looks more cosy than ever in this cheerful fire-light,' Mrs. Wynburn said to herself, as she stirred the glowing coal into a blaze, and drew Sophie's favourite chair closer to the rug. 'How I do

wish she would come! It seems such a long time since James went to Sally Cass's.'

The study bell rang for prayers. Mrs. Wynburn went down; Hannah and Susan went in from the kitchen. Hannah looked at the two vacant places and sighed audibly. Mr. Dunning read prayers in a voice stronger and sterner than usual. The storm went on rising, and falling, and rushing, and sobbing. The clock in the hall struck ten—and ten solemn, deep-sounding strokes clanged out above the storm from the old clock in the church-tower. Prayers were over; Hannah and Susan left the room; Mrs. Wynburn remained standing on the rug by the study fire, her pale face paler than ever; a drawn, rigid look creeping over the lines of her mouth, her eyelids white and heavy with unshed tears. Mr. Dunning watched her silently, and a rare expression of tenderness and sympathy grew visible on his face.

'Mary,' he said, and his voice was gentle and kindly—'Mary, my daughter, we must try to feel trustful and hopeful.'

'Oh, yes, father! I cannot, of course, help feeling anxious now it is getting so late and stormy; but it would be impossible to dread that any real harm has happened to my child.'

Mr. Dunning did not feel the impossibility of such dread. He knew that Sophie was not likely to have

allowed herself to be detained anywhere on slight grounds. The idea that she had taken shelter from the weather he had discarded long ago. 'She would never have stayed late enough to give cause for anxiety,' he had thought. Then Mrs. Wynburn had told him of the conversation that had passed between Sophie and herself in the dining-room, and for a moment the suspicion that his grand-daughter might be indulging in a fit of pique by staying at the house of some friend had crossed his mind, but he had rejected the unworthy notion at once. 'Sophie is far above such small-mindedness as that,' he said to himself.

Mrs. Wynburn heard the yard-door open.

'There they are,' she said, leaving the study and rushing into the kitchen.

It was only old James, dripping with wet, the cloak over his arm, the umbrella in his hand, the goloshes in his pocket.

James was slow to speak.

'He had nothin' much to tell,' he said. 'Miss Sophie hadn't been at Sally Cass's, but Sally had seen her takin' a walk doon t' Clayburn Road a gay bit afoöre dark.'

That was all. James said nothing of the fact that he had walked nearly all the way to Clayburn, inquiring of everyone he met, and at every cottage, if they

had seen 'a young laädy in a black velvet hat, an' a leet graäy jacket?' No one had seen the young lady—no other information was to be had.

James put his wet hat on the fender, took down another from a peg behind the door, asked Susan to give him a dry cloak or shawl, and stood waiting for further orders. Mrs. Wynburn went to her own room for a few minutes, and then returned to the study.

'What had we better do next, father?' she said calmly.

Mr. Dunning sat and thought. He thought of his helplessness, and a flush of pain spread over his face and under his thin white hair. He thought of his daughter, and of the stormy night eighteen years ago. He thought of his grandchild, and of the storm that was raging now. 'What had we better do next?' he asked himself again and again. What a difficult question it was to answer!

'I think we must have assistance, Mary,' he said at last.

'I have thought of that, father; but I would avoid the exposure if possible. I know my child is safe.'

Mr. Dunning looked up with surprise. His daughter stood before him, cold and pale and rigid as marble, her hands lightly crossed before her, her blue-gray eyes clear and tranquil and sad, her whole expression

placid and unexcited. 'Was her composure genuine, or only assumed?' he asked himself. He could not understand it; he could hardly believe in it. He could not look within and see how it had grown out of surrounding influences. Mrs. Wynburn had perceived that her father's anxiety was increasing; that old Hannah's convictions of coming evil had given place to utter despair; that James had his own private opinions; that even Susan was beginning to show signs of agitation; and, seeing all this, she had unconsciously risen out of it. She had felt her own hopes revive, and her own innate power increase with a strange sudden force that she could not comprehend:

'It is very good for strength

To know that some one needs you to be strong.'

They were all needing her strength, it seemed. God helping her, it should not be wanting. God *would* help her, as He had always done. Was not her child in His hands? Had she not prayed to Him for her? Because He had seen good for some wise end to deny her prayer when she prayed for her husband, should she doubt His willingness to hear or answer when she prayed for her child? God keep her from such sin as that. . . . It was thus that calmness and strength had come.

James stood waiting in the kitchen. Mr. Dunning sat thinking in the study. The clocks struck eleven; the sound died away on the rushing wind. The violence of the storm seemed to increase every moment. What was passing through the widow's heart as she stood so quietly by her father's chair? Was she thinking of the past or the present? What special meaning had the voice of the night-wind for her now?

She spoke at last.

'Father,' she said calmly, 'I think I should like to go out with James myself this time.'

'Mary! it would be almost madness to think of doing so on such a night as this; besides, what would be the use of your going? and where can you go?'

'We should go down the Clayburn Road, father, of course; and as to the weather, you know I never take cold. Please let me go.'

'But I cannot see the use of it, Mary. What are your suppositions?'

Mrs. Wynburn was silent: she had no suppositions—or if she had, they were such as could not be made audible. Words were wanting to tell of the strong wish—strong as an impulse or an instinct, that was rising within her. It was not a feeling to be explained or reasoned upon. She could only plead, 'Do let me go.'

Helpless, anxious, and perplexed, and seeing how earnest was his daughter's wish, Mr. Dunning consented at last. It was nearly twelve o'clock now. Susan was persuaded to go to bed; she went very unwillingly. No entreaties could prevail upon Hannah to lie down for an hour or two and allow Susan to sit up. Poor old woman; as she stood in the semi-darkness at the further end of the hall, waiting to see if Mrs. Wynburn was properly wrapped up for such a wild expedition, a few very sad tears fell over her wrinkled cheeks.

'Tak' care on her, Jemmy,' she said to the old man who was standing near. 'Tak' care on her, an' doänt goä far: it's neä use.'

Very desolate the little town seems as Mrs. Wynburn glances up the street before turning down the Clayburn Road. Three solitary gas-lamps flicker dimly at wide intervals, and are reflected on the wet pavement, in the pools of water that make the roads seem like a wind-swept lake, in the little streams that run with gurgling sound down the narrow channels at the sides. There are no lights in the cottages; blinds are drawn at the upper windows; doors and shutters fast closed below. There is no echo of footfall in the streets. No sign or sound of movement anywhere, but the rush of the driving rain, and the piercing gusts of the chilling north-east wind.

Bravely and silently the frail little woman struggles on by the side of the faithful old man. Silent of necessity, for words, if needed, could scarcely be heard. Nearly a mile and a half down the road, Sally Cass's cottage stands. Sally is an old woman and lives alone. 'It is no use arousing her,' Mrs. Wynburn says in a low voice, as they stand for a few minutes under shelter of the overhanging gable. James thinks it will be no use at all. He repeats what Sally Cass had told him in exactly the same words, and then confesses that he had been down as far as Raven Hill Farm—within a mile of Clayburn Rectory—when he was out before. That he had made inquiries of everyone he met, and at every house, but no one had seen Miss Sophie go down the road except Sally Cass, who had not seen her return.

'Do you think the old woman could be mistaken, James?' Mrs. Wynburn asks in the steadiest voice she can command.

'Noä, ma'am; ah doänt. She knew exackaly what Miss Sophie had on; an' she said she'd watched her walkin' awaäy doon t' roäd as hansom' as a laädy in a pictur'.'

'James, if you have been so far before, you are not able to walk to Clayburn with me now.'

'Askin' yer pardon, ma'am, ah reckon ah sall be a deal mair able than you. But if ya wad tak' advice

fra' me ya wad never think o' walkin' ony further te-neet. It cannot be of ony use, for there's a dozen or mair o' hooses an' cottages atween here an' Raven Hill; an' Miss Sophie could niver ha' gone to Clayburn without bein' seen on t' roäd. Besides, there was noä sort o' reason for her goin' there when Mr. an' Mrs. Lytham an' t' young laädies was all at Cornborough. There's noä doobt at all but what Miss Sophie com' doon this waäy, but she may ha' turned back twenty times an' Sally Cass not ha' seed her; or she may ha' gone doon by Welford Lane an' across by Dunmire Hollow. There's noä sayin'. Ah reckon we mun be content te waäit till morning noo. Do, if ya please, ma'am, think o' turnin' back; ah'm sadly miste'an if daäyleet dusn't bring leet o' another kind.'

As James concludes, the tones of his voice falter painfully. 'Is he tired, or is there other meaning in his words?' Poor little heart-sick mother! how weary she is of her own and other people's conjectures! What a long day it has been! How bravely she is struggling to keep up her strength! Hope still lives: God grant it be not very long deferred. As she stands there, trying to discover clearly the next step on the path of duty, there is a slight change in the weather. The rain ceases, the wind tosses the branches of the roadside trees to and fro less furiously, and the clouds break and spread into long bars faintly edged with

silver. Mrs. Wynburn feels renewed energy, and longs, with an almost uncontrollable longing, to go forward; but if James is tired—and, poor old man! he must be—it will be impossible to think of asking him to go. What must she do?

‘James,’ she says presently, ‘will you go back to the Vicarage? I should like to go on, and I can go alone quite well. I shall be perfectly safe.’

‘Mrs. Wynburn, ah’d niver dare leuk neyther you nor t’ maäster i’ t’ faäce agaän if ah left you on t’ roäd by yersen of a neet like this. Noä, noä; goä where ya will, ma’am, an’ ah’ll goä wi’ ya; but ah still think it’s a pity to spend yer strength for nought when ya maäy need all ya hev’ an’ mair afoöre another sun sets.’

James speaks wearily. Mrs. Wynburn is silent yet a few moments longer; then she says in a low, sad voice:

‘We will go back, James.’

The old man hears the words gladly; not for his own sake altogether.

But as they turn up the road again, a piercing gust of wind sweeps up from the north-east. The widow, overworn in body and overstrained in mind, listens to its wailing piteous accents, and a thrill of pain shivers through every nerve. There is surely a cry!—a plaining, lamenting cry—it comes up from the sea,

over the Clayburn rocks, over the grave in the churchyard on the cliff. Mrs. Wynburn stops and turns; it seems as if her heart stops too. How can she go back to her sheltered, comfortable home, and leave her child—her only child—to waste hopeless cries on the stormy night-wind? The inward struggle is exhausting. . . .

They stand thus for some minutes. James sighs wearily, and moves uneasily. His sigh sounds like a reproach; Mrs. Wynburn stifles a sob of keenest anguish, and turns her face towards the Vicarage once more.

She walks on silently, prayerfully, and grows calmer—a calmness born of resignation and exhaustion, not of despair. The storm is subsiding rapidly now. As they pass through the Vicarage gates, the wind falls into a disconsolate murmur, and a few pale stars glimmer faintly between the branches of the trees. They enter the house by the kitchen door. Hannah is sitting in a mournful attitude by the fire—she has been watching and waiting there long, but she makes no sign, utters no word of disappointment when only two figures emerge from the outer darkness. Mrs. Wynburn goes at once to the study, glancing at the hall-clock as she passes; it points to a quarter to two. Mr. Dunning is reading: he looks up eagerly as his daughter enters; listens quietly as she gives

the best account she can of the tristful walk they have had ; but he asks no question, offers no consolation. For a moment he looks a little confused, vacant, then he tries to fix his thoughts on his books again, but he does not succeed. Presently he makes an effort to speak, but speech is difficult, his lips quiver, his voice is hoarse and trembling, he cannot remember what he had intended to say. He hesitates a little longer, and then bids his daughter change her wet clothing, and come back to the study fire. Mrs. Wynburn leaves the room—perhaps a little surprised that her father's emotion should be thus evident. She is quite unconscious of the fact that she has witnessed a slight attack of paralysis.

Mrs. Wynburn goes upstairs. The door of Sophie's room is slightly ajar, and the bright firelight within flickers temptingly. With sad weary step she crosses the landing, altogether unprepared for the fresh disappointment which awaits her. As she opens the door, a cry of surprise breaks from her lips, the warm blood mounts to her pallid face: Sophie's chair is occupied. . . . The widow rushes forward—stops—covers her face with her hands, and presses her fingers tightly over her aching eyes to keep the hot tears back. It is Susan who is sitting there asleep. The poor girl's face is terribly stained and swollen with weeping.

As Mrs. Wynburn turns to leave the room, Susan awakes and starts up with many apologies. She had been too restless to stay in bed, and coming into Miss Wynburn's room to look at the fire, she had remained there. She is very sorry, she says truthfully, as she perceives in a dim way the mistake into which Mrs. Wynburn has fallen.

'Are you *very* tired, Susan?' Mrs. Wynburn inquires.

'No, ma'am; I don't feel tired in the least. Can I do anything?'

'Will you go down and make some wine hot, and take it to James before he goes to bed. Ask him first if there is anything he would like better. And then do go to bed yourself, Susan. Nothing more can be done till daylight.'

Mrs. Wynburn changed her dress, remained for a while in her own room, and then went down to the kitchen to try once more if she could prevail upon old Hannah to go to bed. She found that James and Susan had just gone, but no entreaties could induce Hannah to follow their example. She sat silent and hopeless, rocking herself to and fro on a low chair by the fire, and brooding intently over the mysterious sorrow that had fallen upon her master's house.

When Mrs. Wynburn went back to the study, Mr. Dunning was calm and composed as usual. His face

was grayer and his voice somewhat feebler, but no other sign of change was apparent. His daughter sat down by his side, sat there for long weary hours that would have been full of intolerable anguish but for her father's unwonted kindness and his words of true soul-strengthening comfort. It seemed as if their heavy mutual grief had drawn these two closer together; as if the love of years had been lying imprisoned in silence and darkness, waiting only to be released by the coming of the Angel of Sorrow.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE SCAUR.

WHILE Mrs. Wynburn stood with some of her visitors in the churchyard, feeling subdued and yet uplifted by the wondrous glory of the sunset that had heralded the storm, her daughter sat watching as much of its beauty as could be seen from the ruins of Dunmire Castle. Sophie had left the Vicarage about an hour before, still feeling—as I have said she felt when she went to her own room—angry and sad and self-reproachful. She had not remained in her room long. Her thoughts were not just then pleasant companions; but, after hesitating a little as to whether she would

go down and help to look after some of the younger children, or whether she would go for a short brisk walk and come back to tea with pleasanter feelings, she had decided upon the latter. 'There are plenty of people on the lawn to help,' she had thought; 'so many that no one will miss me; and I never get rid of evil spirits so thoroughly as when I walk them down.'

Leaving the Vicarage by the yard-door, Sophie turned almost instinctively towards the Clayburn Road: she could not have told why or wherefore. Indeed, her mind was too much absorbed by uneasy thoughts to leave room for any very distinct ideas about her walk. She passed Sally Cass's cottage without being aware of it, went on and on, walking more quickly as she grew more angry with herself, until, at last, she came to the end of Welford Lane—a lane leading across by Dunmire Hollow into the high-road which led from Welford Bay to Cornborough. Sophie paused a moment at the end of the lane, and decided that, as she had come so far, she would go across by the Hollow, and home by the Welford Road. She would be back quite early enough for tea, she thought.

Dunmire Hollow is a deep rocky ravine, thickly wooded, and watered by a little beck that rises in the moor where the ravine closes, and falls into the sea

where the darkly-lichened crags, instead of being hidden by tall trees, are only enlivened by a few sparse whin-bushes and stunted shrubs. Two or three miles the little brown rill runs murmuring over the stones.

The rough steep path that Sophie chose led down the Hollow to a little bridge that crossed the beck about half-way between the moor and the sea. Tall trees, not yet quite leafless, towered up till they seemed to touch the sky, their heavy, gaunt-looking boughs interwoven above, the interlacing roots spreading over huge boulders of bare red sandstone or moss-blackened crag like curious gray network below. Dark undergrowth of bracken and brushwood, rank and untrodden in the chill perpetual gloom; tall ferns, rich with the hues of autumn, bending over massive green stones till they touched the little beck, which was brown and swollen and noisy now; a bird or two twittering in the branches overhead; the western sky beginning to gleam crimson and gold through the trees. The scene was irresistible. Sophie stood long on the little bridge that crossed the beck.

But, as the sky surrounding the setting sun becomes more and more intensely vivid and beautiful, Sophie grows less contented with her position. 'I will just go down as far as the Castle,' she says to herself; 'I

shall see it much better from the old wall.' She turns down a narrow path under the trees, walks quickly round the point of a huge darkly-looming crag, crowned with gnarled oak-trees, takes a short-cut through the bracken, that reaches as high as her shoulder, and comes to an open space that marks the widest part of the ravine. The ground rises in the centre of the space in the form of a small uneven plateau, with sloping sides. On the top of this plateau stands the ruin of Duamire Castle, consisting of tottering remains of the round towers, which have stood at various angles, of crumbling ivy-covered walls, six feet thick, and of traces of a keep, which has occupied an area of some fifty feet. Sophie climbs a little slope, prickly with briar and glossy with hart's-tongue, and sits down on a stone near the mullioned window that has lighted the hall of Dunmire Castle.

Sitting there, near the gray ruin, in the valley filled with golden haze, trees rustling gently, the yellow leaves falling, swiftly-changing scenes moving across the glorious sky, Sophie's anger passed away rapidly. Contrition followed, and then pity and tenderness and love—weakly children that had struggled into existence long ago, plaining at the door of her heart for homelier shelter, kindlier care, more generous nourishment. Sophie heard the plaintive cry, her soul went

out yearning with sympathy to meet it, and a flood of tears—such tears as she had never shed before—swept away the barriers that had so long withstood the strength of a mother's love.

Sophie's feelings were strong and genuine to bitterness. Her own dark moods and ill-controlled waywardness, her mother's gentle temper and patient long-suffering; her own hardness and self-sufficiency, yielding only now and then to the instincts of natural affection; her mother's strong, silent, passionate love—love so mingled with sorrow once, so chastened into resignation now—Sophie had seen all: and these things passed before her like spectral shadows as the twilight gloom gathered quickly over the valley of Dunmire. Sternly and sadly she reviewed the past, laid bare before herself her failings and errors, condemned her motives, compared her character with the character of Him in whose footsteps she had in a far-off way striven to follow: following Him, alas! 'in ways He never trod.' With bowed head and covered face she asked forgiveness for the past, help and strength for the present, light and guidance for the future, and for grace to strive daily and hourly to become more like Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and who promised rest—rest present and eternal, to the souls of those who should learn of Him. With a strength that was not earth-born,

Sophie resolved that she would learn the lessons He had lived and suffered and died to teach. She would begin from the present hour. No more putting off till a convenient season ; no more waiting for pliant moods.

She rose up to go. She had been sitting there but a brief time, and yet it seemed as if a crisis of life had been passed—a true crisis, not a change wrought by a passing impression. It was not, of course, the work of an hour—such mutations seldom are. We feel, perhaps, that the current of our inner life has changed its course suddenly, but it may have been gliding on towards the turning-point for months or years. It was so with Sophie. The long strife and struggle that had seemed so fruitless was decided to-night : she was victorious, and she felt as victors in such battles generally do feel—strong and calm, and humble and gentle. She thought only of her mother ; of hastening back to put an end, at once and for ever, to all that had of late so marred the peace and beauty of her life. All fearfulness and diffidence vanished with the dawn of true love-light. ‘I will find an opportunity to say a word or two to her as soon as I get back,’ Sophie said to herself ; ‘and I will tell her all before I go to bed. And for the future, whether I think I am right or wrong, I will yield to her judgment in all things, as it is my duty to do. The scene of to-day shall never be repeated.’

Thinking thus, Sophie felt a quiet glow of happiness steal over her, so real and natural, and yet so new, that her eyes grew dim with tears again and again as she walked away from the ruin. It was growing very dusky at the bottom of the ravine now; so gloomy it was down under the trees and crags, among the bracken and brushwood, that it was difficult to find the right path again. Sophie hesitated, made a path for herself down to the side of the beck, and followed its course upwards till she came to some stepping-stones that had been placed across it. She did not remember having noticed them before, but seeing that there was a track on the other side, leading up the opposite crag in apparently the same direction as the path that led from the bridge, she crossed the little rill, and began to climb the northern side of the ravine, thinking to find herself within a very short distance of the Welford Road when she came to the top.

But Sophie was mistaken. Climbing the rugged, tortuous path as quickly as she could in the double gloom of woody shade and fast-increasing twilight, she found to her surprise that it led only to a long sweep of barren, stony waste, stretching away beyond the edge of the ravine as far as she could see. Treeless it was, and apparently trackless, and dotted with heaps of stone and stray whin-bushes. Glancing

across in the direction in which she supposed the Welford Road must lie, she saw something rising darkly against the sky. 'Perhaps it is a farmhouse, or a cottage,' she thought, as she stood straining her eyes in the dim twilight; 'if it is, I will go and ask someone to show me the quickest way back to the highroad.' Presently she discovered traces of a path, evidently a continuation of the one by which she had come up from the Hollow; then the traces disappeared, and she went on, slipping over stones into pools of clayey water, stopping and peering into the gloom before her, and then finding the track and losing it again. It was a wearisome walk. The houses were much farther off than she had imagined; no lights were visible in the windows, no sounds of life were audible, and she began to wish earnestly that she had crossed the waste in a more westerly direction.

When Sophie came nearer to the buildings, to her utter astonishment she found herself on the edge of a deeply indented part of the coast. She had very little idea now of her whereabouts, and, to add to her perplexity, she found that her hope of obtaining information was a vain one. A long row of wretched-looking cottages stood before her—doorless, windowless, and entirely deserted. They had been built as temporary homes for some miners who had worked a seam

of ironstone in Dunmire Hollow years ago, and whose daily passing to and fro had worn the path which had led Sophie hither.

Nothing daunted, she stopped for a moment and looked round, trying to discover a light in the windows of some homestead, or a track across the western portion of the waste, but no such guides were discernible. Night was coming on, the wind was rising rapidly—a chill north-east wind it was—a driving rain was beginning to fall, and the heavy blue-black mists came up from the sea, reminding her that there was no time to be lost in hesitation. Quickly she decided that she would cross over to the edge of the cliff, try to find a pathway leading down to the shore, and go along by the sands to Welford Bay. It would be the most certain and direct proceeding under the circumstances, and, if she found that it was very late when she got to Welford, she would try to procure some kind of conveyance. Her mother would already be growing anxious, she was afraid.

Sophie was not long in finding a path down the cliff; there were at least half a dozen in the vicinity of the deserted cottages. Choosing the one that appeared to have been most used, she went tripping down over the stones as lightly and quickly as was possible in the almost darkness. Sorry she was for

her mother's sake that she had made that stupid mistake in the wood. Why had she not followed the beck a little further till she came to the bridge? She would have been almost at Cornborough by this time. But she would soon be at Welford, and she would certainly try to find someone who would take her home as quickly as possible. If Mr. Dennison had not been at the school-feast, she might have gone to the Rectory; but it was no use thinking of what might have been; her present duty was to get over the ground as quickly as she could.

But the steep, rugged cliffside was not ground to be hurried over, even in broadest daylight or driest seasons; it was dangerous now in the semi-darkness, and with little clayey streams running down between the stones. Sophie was obliged to be more careful as she neared the foot of the cliff; but, careful as she was, she slipped heavily over a piece of wet rock that was lying almost on the sand, and when she attempted to rise, she found herself unable to do so. Her ankle was sprained, perhaps broken. The pain was intense when she tried to move.

Again Sophie's thoughts turned homewards. Whatever pain she might suffer, she could not lie there waiting for the chance of assistance—not an impossible chance, as she knew: the sand was the high-road between Clayburn and Welford Bay; but Sophie,

knowing how her mother's heart would be tortured by anxiety, could not wait there for help—she must make some effort, however small. Poor girl! her pain was terrible as she moved slowly over a few feet of sand in the face of the rough wind and the driving rain, and, to add to her distress, she found that the tide was rising. 'Would it be possible to pass Wyke Point?' she asked herself, as she sat down on the sand to try to ease her pain for a moment.

Wyke Point is a tall black ness jutting out from the face of the cliff about a quarter of a mile south of Welford Bay. Sophie's acquaintance with it was limited; but she knew that it was not passable at high water. She must strain every nerve now. It was useless to think of going back the way she had come; and there were rocks on the coast in the direction of Clayburn that might probably be just as impassable as Wyke Point. Besides, she knew that, having passed Dunmire Hollow, she must be much nearer to Welford than to Clayburn. There was no alternative—she must go forward.

The storm and the darkness increased, and the hoarse sound of the angry breakers rolling in and dashing upon the shore grew louder and nearer. Here and there gleams of light burst through the dense clouds at intervals, showing the dark cliffs towering up on the left, and the long lines of white-

crested waves gleaming to the right, and then all was darkness again. Presently, a cloud breaking overhead showed a tall mass of rock stretching across the sand, and for the first time Sophie felt fear—she saw that the white foam of the breakers was already leaping amongst the pile of huge stones that lay at the foot of the headland before her.

Slowly and painfully Sophie dragged herself along to the point of danger. Her gratitude was unspeakable when she found that it was not so dangerous as it had appeared. The stones—pieces of rock that had fallen from the top of the headland—were so large, and some of those nearest to the rock piled so high, that only the spray of the advancing waves had reached them as yet. With difficulty she began to climb. The wind drove the rain in her face, the darkness was almost complete, the stones were wet; once or twice she slipped and grew almost faint with agony, the spray of a heavy wave dashed over her, the sea roared hoarsely round her; her heart began to palpitate; she dreaded her strength giving way; but at last, trembling, almost exhausted, she reached the sand on the other side, and from the storm-swept shore an earnest prayer of thankfulness went up to Heaven.

Again Sophie went slowly on, keeping close to the cliffs, and hoping now every moment to see the lights

in the fishermen's cottages at Welford Bay. She had nothing more to fear, she thought: what a relief it was—the pain and the storm and the darkness were as trifles. Ah! there was a light at last; but that could not be at Welford, it was too much to the east. No, it was a moving light—moving slowly to the north: suddenly it disappeared. It was one of the Welford Bay fishing-boats, and it had just rounded Wyke Point.

Once at least, to most of us, there comes an hour in our lives when it seems as if the depth and strength of our entire character were to be tested. The hour may be condensed into minutes, or it may be lengthened into days or years. The test which is to try the whole nature may be spiritual, mental, or physical, or it may be complicated; but God's purposes, infinitely high and wide—in small things as in great—are ever the same. Well is it with those who can discern His purpose while the hour which is to prove their strength is yet a present hour.

Fortunately for Sophie Wynburn, in a dim, uncertain way she did perceive something of the power that was working around and within her on this night of trial. Something—not all that she might have done—but enough to give strength, calmness, and submission. After the little fishing-boat had passed, and she had walked on but a very few yards farther,

she came to where the giant form of Wyke Point loomed up before her. Dark as it was, she recognised its outline; remembered that she had failed to do so when she came to the smaller rock which she had passed, and for a moment, after she had realized her position, she felt stunned almost to unconsciousness. It was but for a moment; recovering herself, she walked with much pain and without hope, a few yards down by the side of a huge headland, to ascertain beyond doubt that it was impassable. Her walk was not prolonged; the rising tide had covered the foot of Wyke Point an hour ago, and the waves—extending in a semicircle across the little bay formed by the rock she had passed and the one before her—were rolling in rapidly towards the perpendicular face of the cliff that rose up in the background.

Making an almost superhuman effort, Sophie recrossed the little bay; but only to find that the waves were breaking over the topmost point of the headland which she had so lately rounded. Turning back, she tried to find or to make a pathway over the rock, up the face of the cliff, or on the side of Wyke Point, but she tried vainly; escape seemed impossible. There was only one hope—the tide might not rise quite high enough to cover the whole of the sand—if it did! . . . God's will be done.

For twenty minutes, or perhaps half an hour,

Sophie knelt at the foot of the cliff; praying as human beings rarely pray till the chastening Hand has been laid heavily upon them. Not despairingly she prayed, not even when she heard and felt the foam of the surging waves roll close to her feet. Her heart palpitated quickly, her temples throbbed, her eyeballs seemed to burn, her knees trembled and shook as she rose up again, yet still there was strength within. Spiritual strength to resign her life if God should require it; physical strength to make one more effort—God helping her—to preserve it.

Sophie was in the angle of the bay where Wyke Point jutted out from the face of the cliff. The sand was entirely covered now, but the waves had not yet reached the loose shale that lay on the scaur immediately under the rock. With much suffering she tried once more to scale the face of the cliff, but it was clayey and wet and slippery, and she could not obtain foothold even for a moment. Then she turned to the rock again; her hand torn and cut by previous attempts; agonizing pangs from her sprained or broken ankle shooting through her whole frame, and the spray of the advancing waves drenching her, and checking her efforts more violently every moment. The struggle was growing hopeless.

A few more minutes passed over—they seemed like hours. Sophie had grasped the sharp edge of a pro-

jecting piece of scaur, and was clinging to it desperately, and the tide—thundering up the side of the point, and along the bottom of the cliff—came rolling into the angle to expend the whole of its gathered force. Humanly speaking, her life at this moment hung upon the power of her bleeding hands to hold to the ledge. Another wave, higher, heavier than the rest. She thought of her mother, her grandfather, her home, of a thousand things, so it seemed; made one more effort, yet more desperate than the others, to climb the face of the rock. The wave dashed under her feet, she felt herself uplifted; still holding with her right hand to the scaur, she struck the left deeply, convulsively into the wet clay of the cliff. One more wave washed over her, another and yet another rolled close to her feet, then there was a pause in the onward rush, and clinging and climbing with the energy of unyielding hope, her feet rested on the ledge of the rock she had grasped with her hands. It was a broad shelving ledge, sloping inward to the face of the headland, and, groping her way across it, Sophie felt that she was safe. One more prayer of thankfulness, or, rather, a strong desire to offer such a prayer, and then she sank down utterly helpless and exhausted; and yet, strange to say, acutely conscious of all that had passed or was passing around her.

For how many hours she lay there Sophie knew

not. Sustained by the priceless strength which belongs only to youth and perfect health, sheltered in some degree from the storm by the rock overhead, and freed from the dread of a fearful death, she felt a strange calm steal over her—the calm which over-fatigue—nature's own nepenthe—rarely fails to bring. Real sleep was not, of course, possible; her pain was too keen and her mental faculties had been too highly strained for that; but after midnight, when the tide had receded, and its thundering, swelling sound had died down to a hoarse murmur, when the wind had fallen, the rain ceased, and when the clouds began to spread into silver-edged bars, and a few faint stars appeared, Sophie fell into that dreamy, intermediate state which may be called sleep of the third degree; that strange phase of being so familiar to the sorrow-stricken, the nervous sufferer, the brain-worker and others to whom the blessing of a whole night of sound, dreamless sleep is but a remembrance. It was new to Sophie. Thoughts and regrets, and hopes and fears, 'an undistinguishable throng,' crowded through her brain in dream-like confusion; and yet no change in the sky, no plash of falling wave, or sound of wind amongst the rocks, escaped her notice. Now and then she could discern the light of a passing ship far out at sea, and, as dawn began to break, white sails gleamed out of the gray clouds which skirted the

horizon, and then streaks of purple and crimson and gold rose over the dark headland at the other side of the bay, tinging the points of the distant cliffs with delicate colours of every hue. Sophie grew restless and uneasy on her rocky bed, and, rousing herself to distinct consciousness, the thought of the terrible night of anxiety which her mother would be passing flashed across her mind with a sudden pang that was full of anguish. Sophie's thoughts—half dreams they were—had been of Mrs. Wynburn for hours. She had felt the touch of her mother's hand cool on her forehead as she lay burning with fever; she had given back her warm kiss in moments when chill gusts of wind were shivering through her wet clothing, and yet it seemed as if this thought of her were the first. Sophie reproached herself, crept to the edge of the rock, saw how difficult it would be for her to reach the sand again by the rocky angle she had climbed with such desperate energy when the waves were washing over her. Then she crept along the ledge towards the sea; it shelved downward to the shore a little, and terminated abruptly against a projecting part of the headland. Sophie stood, or rather knelt, for a moment on the ledge, looking down the seven or eight feet of perpendicular black wall that was between her and the sand; then she turned, and, holding by the jagged edge of the shelf, swung herself

round, thinking to slide gradually down, resting her weight when she reached the sand upon her uninjured foot. But the piece of rock by which she held gave way; she slipped to the beach heavily, the whole of her weight falling—so it seemed—upon her sprained ankle. She staggered for a moment, fell on the sand; the dawn-light died slowly out of the heavens, the sound of the waves went further and further away into the distance. Sophie was insensible.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT THE MORNING BROUGHT.

As daylight spread over the moor, three persons walked rapidly down from Heather Brow to Cornborough. They were Mr. Fenton, Mrs. Wynburn, and Susan. Mrs. Wynburn had consented at last that advice and assistance should be sought; and Mr. Dunning had expressed a wish to see his curate before making their trouble known to anyone else.

Old James was deeply grieved when he came downstairs—a little later than usual—and found that Mrs. Wynburn had gone to Heather Brow. Poor old man! his rheumatism was so troublesome,

his mind so much perplexed, his heart so heavy, that perhaps he was excusable to some extent for speaking so crossly to Hannah for not having called him. Had Hannah's grief been less profound, there would have been a war of words, the translation of which into Queen's English would have been a work of difficulty. But the old woman said little this morning; her voice was as subdued, her step as hushed, and her mien as reverent, as if her worst foreboding had already been fulfilled.

When Mr. Fenton, Mrs. Wynburn, and Susan reached the Vicarage, the two former went to the study. Mr. Dunning was still sitting in his chair, and, as he lifted his ashen-gray face and held out his tremulous hand, it seemed to Mr. Fenton as if the departing night had done the work of years. The invalid's words were very few. He inquired if Mrs. Wynburn had told Mr. Fenton of Sophie's disappearance, and asked his advice as to the quietest and readiest mode of instituting search for her.

Mr. Fenton gave the best counsel he could. He recommended that Mrs. Wynburn should try to take some rest at once, seeing plainly that her strength was not likely to hold out much longer, and he would himself go over to Dr. Elton's, he said. The doctor was a strong man, and kind-hearted and energetic—a man to be trusted to for help in adversity at all times.

He would consult with him, and Mr. Dunning and Mrs. Wynburn might rest assured that no effort should be spared.

Mr. Fenton left the Vicarage. The morning advanced; the gray clouds overhead drifted away, showing the bright blue ether; the sun shone out; sounds of life broke the silence. The world without was going on just as usual; over the world within, the chill and the hush of sorrow brooded heavily.

Very soon after Mr. Fenton had left the Vicarage, he was walking quickly down Priorsgate with Dr. Elton. Mrs. Wynburn had told Mr. Fenton of the slight clue afforded by the fact that Sally Cass had seen Sophie go down the Clayburn Road. They were going to call at Sally's cottage before proceeding any further.

But just as they reached the point where the road branched off—on the right, in the direction of Clayburn; on the left, towards Welford Bay—Dr. Elton paused a moment, and drew his companion's attention to the fact that a carriage was being driven rapidly up the Welford Road. They decided to wait a few minutes. It was rather unusual for carriages to be seen entering Cornborough so early in the morning.

The vehicle was Mr. Dennison's pony phaeton, and the driver was Mr. Dennison himself. Simultaneously the three gentlemen recognised each other, and as the

Rector of Scoreby-cum-Welford drew up, throwing his favourite pony almost on its haunches, he shouted :

‘Capital!—the very men I wanted! You’re going to look for Sophie Wynburn? All right; she’s at Welford. Where’s her mother?’

‘At the Vicarage. All right did you say Sophie was?’ Mr. Fenton inquired.

‘She’ll come all right in time; fainted on the sands or something of that kind. But we must go and tell the mother. Will you be walking down the road? I shall overtake you in five minutes.’

Mr. Dennison’s five minutes lengthened into fifteen, and when he reappeared Mrs. Wynburn was with him. Little need, I should think, to describe the wondrous change that had passed over the widow’s face. Her eyes were bright; patches of crimson colour were burning on either cheek; her lips were compressed, as if she were trying to stop the involuntary quivering that was visible at the corners of her mouth; intense concentration was expressed on every feature. Neither Mr. Fenton nor Dr. Elton spoke to her as they took their places in the phaeton. She was conscious of their kindness, and remembered it thankfully.

In the *staccato* style usually adopted by Mr. Dennison when in a state of excitement, that gentleman had told Mr. Dunning and Mrs. Wynburn all he

chose to tell of Sophie. . . . Two fishermen and a girl—Clayburn folk, all of them—coming along the sand toward Welford Bay at sunrise, had seen a lady lying close under the side of Wyke Point. Insensible she was when they found her, but the girl had bathed her face with water, and she had revived. One of the men had run round the Point, along the beach, and into the nearest cottage; dragged out a 'squab' covered with feather cushions and patchwork, obtained the assistance of another man; together they had hurried back to the place where Sophie was struggling to rise, placed her gently upon the quaint-looking couch, and carried her over the smooth sands to the Bay. They had taken her to the same cottage from which the 'squab' had been so forcibly borrowed, carried her through the kitchen to a tiny bedroom beyond, and sent for Mr. Barnard the chemist and Mr. Dennison the parson.

Further than that the Rector's story did not go; but there was more that he might have told. When he had entered the little room where Sophie was lying, strong man as he was, he had turned so pale that the fisherman's wife had asked him if he was ill. It was terrible to see one whom he had heard spoken of only yesterday as the tallest, strongest, handsomest young lady in the neighbourhood lying there with pallid face and heavy eyes, her hands cruelly lacer-

ated, her clothing torn and wet, her strength gone, and, what was worse, her brain clouded; for Sophie was talking rapidly and incoherently to everyone around her. Mr. Dennison had cleared the cottage of onlookers, charged Mr. Barnard to allow no one to enter the room but the fisherman's wife or Mrs. Dennison, gone back as quickly as he could to the Rectory, and sent his wife and eldest daughter down to look after Sophie till he should return from Cornborough.

Mrs. and Miss Dennison had done much to improve Sophie's appearance before Mrs. Wynburn arrived at the little cottage, and they had also been of service in withholding a few doses of Mr. Barnard's too exciting restoratives. Sophie was calmer than she had been for some time when her mother crept quietly to the bedside and bent to kiss her. She smiled, and asked how her grandfather was; but her faint recognition was evidently the result of much effort, and an amount of confusion and bewilderment followed that was painful to witness.

Dr. Elton was standing by the side of the little bed. He understood Mrs. Wynburn's appealing glance in a moment, but it was difficult to answer.

'I think you have a close carriage, Mrs. Dennison?' he said, turning to that lady.

'Yes, a most comfortable one, and it could be ready

in ten minutes; but do you not think it would be better to remove Miss Wynburn to the Rectory for a few days? We will do everything we can for her, and Mrs. Wynburn will come too, of course.'

Dr. Elton paused a moment: 'I think it is more desirable that she should be taken home at once,' he said. 'Shall I ask Mr. Dennison about the carriage?'

Mr. Dennison, who was standing with Mr. Fenton by the kitchen window, repeated his wife's invitation most urgently; but seeing that Dr. Elton's opinion was decided, he went off to order the carriage at once.

When the doctor returned to the inner room, Mrs. Wynburn was standing near the foot of the bed. Mrs. Dennison had apologized for not having taken Sophie's wet boots off, saying that 'Miss Wynburn appeared to feel pain somewhere when they attempted to remove them.' Mrs. Wynburn had cut the elastic at the sides, drawn off the boots and the equally wet stockings; and was placing the swollen, discoloured right ankle on a pillow.

Tenderly enough to satisfy even the mother did Dr. Elton make his careful examination; but he was a very long time, she thought, as she watched him eagerly and impatiently. He looked up at last: 'There is no fracture,' he said, with evident relief.

'Is there not, Dr. Elton? are you quite sure?'

Sophie said, in a clear, rapid voice. 'Well, perhaps you are right; it is much less painful now than it was an hour ago when I sat in Dunmire Hollow. How much money would it take to rebuild the Castle I wonder? Have you any idea, mother? . . . What makes one always think of Oliver Cromwell when one sees a ruin? as if ruins and Roundheads had come into the world together. But I was not thinking of the "brave, bad man" when I sat by the Castle window just now; I was thinking of something else: I will tell you what it was after tea, mother, when all the people are gone. . . . How dark it is, and how cold and stormy! and I am getting so wet, so tired, so lonely; I cannot walk any further, and the tide is rising. Oh, mother, mother, mother! Is it really over?—is it?—is it?—and I have been such a strange, unloving daughter; no, not really unloving, but I couldn't tell you I loved you, and I was ashamed to show it. Such false shame it was, and yet I could never put it away until to-night. It is all gone now, mother—gone for ever. Do take me back; let me come back to you only for an hour, to tell you. . . . Oh, mother, mother! it is so cold and dark.'

'Sophie, my child, I am here. We are going home at once; you will be safe in your own little room presently.'

‘ Shall I, mother? how good you are! I will be good too, now; that is, if I can. I have tried before, tried earnestly; but I forgot that the branch cannot bear fruit of itself: help me to remember it, mother, will you? talk to me as you tried to do when I came home from school, when I was so proud and hard and self-willed and self-sufficient. But I am not like that now, mother; indeed I am not. That is all gone—gone for ever. . . . The waves covered Wyke Point an hour ago.’

Mrs. Wynburn turned from the bedside to the window; Dr. Elton followed her to assure her that there was no ground for serious alarm.

‘ You are dreading brain-fever, are you not?’ he said kindly; ‘ there are no symptoms of that at present. Your daughter’s partial delirium is only a rather uncommon phase of hysteria. I shall give her a sedative when we arrive at Cornborough: she will then probably sleep for some hours, and will, I trust, awake perfectly conscious.’

The journey home in Mrs. Dennison’s comfortable carriage was made quickly and easily. Mr. Fenton sat with the driver, rather lamenting to himself that he had had so few opportunities of being useful. Mrs. Wynburn and Dr. Elton were inside with Sophie, who for a short time was very conversational; and then, much to her mother’s satisfaction, settled down into a

state of obtuse indifference, which lasted until they reached Cornborough.

When the clock in the church-tower chimed its ancient psalm-tune at noontide, there was 'calm and deep peace' within the old gray Vicarage. Sophie was sleeping quietly in her own little bed: her beautiful, wavy brown hair unplaited and lying loosely over the pillow, a faint tinge of colour on her cheek, and a natural, painless expression on her features. Mrs. Wynburn was sitting by the bedside, watchful and tranquil, and trying from time to time to put her unspeakable gratitude into silent prayer. James was in the study, wheeling his master's chair into the little room beyond, Mr. Fenton having succeeded in persuading Mr. Dunning to go to bed for a few hours. And Hannah and Susan were discussing recent events in the kitchen, the latter advancing considerably in old Hannah's estimation by confessing herself to be somewhat less sceptical on the subject of the ominous 'Gabriel Hounds.'

'But it isn't so bad as you thought, after all, Hannah; I know you never expected to see Miss Wynburn again.'

'Ah didn't, Susan, ah didn't; but hoo could onybody expect onything when she was te'an awaäy so straängely as that? Ah thowt as ah sat here atween

midneet an' daäyleet 'at ah wad ha' given all ah hev i' t' world te ha' seen her dyin' a nateral death iv her oän bed. But she'll noän dee noo, thank God! She's sleepin' like a top, an' leuks as bonny as iver she did.'

For more than eight long hours Sophie Wynburn lay in placid, dreamless sleep. Dr. Elton called twice during the afternoon, leaving Sophie's watchful little nurse happier each time. Mrs. Fenton, Georgie Stapleton, and one or two other people who had heard of the accident, were thoughtful enough to go round by the yard-door to make their inquiries. Everything had been kept as quiet as possible, all was going on well, and at eight o'clock, leaving old Hannah by Sophie's bedside, Mrs. Wynburn went down to the study to make Mr. Dunning's tea.

Mr. Dunning was sitting by the fire, looking much refreshed. He had slept well, he said, and felt better. He was very glad to hear such good news of his grandchild, and very desirous that his daughter should try to take some rest herself.

'I dare say you feel equal to anything just now, Mary,' he said, 'but Sophie may require a little nursing after to-day. Do be careful of your own health.'

'Thank you, father, I shall. I am hoping to have quite a good night to-night. I am going to have a

bed made up in Sophie's room; but we must not disturb her by making it yet awhile.'

'No, perhaps not; but you are wanting to go back to her, I see. You had better go at once, Mary. Take your cup of tea in your hand, and send me word the instant she awakes.'

Before Mrs. Wynburn left the study she bent to kiss the face that was radiant with such unwonted kindness.

'If my trouble has brought me no other good than this, I shall be thankful for it,' she thought as she went upstairs.

But when Mrs. Wynburn opened the door of Sophie's room joy was added to her gratitude. Sophie was awake, a bright smile on her lips, and her dark-blue eyes so full of meaning and expression that any doubt as to her consciousness would have been almost unpardonable.

Putting her cup of tea on Sophie's little writing-table, Mrs. Wynburn went round to the side of the bed.

'Are you better, my child?' she said gently.

'Yes, mother, thank you, much better; so well, indeed, that I was beginning to grumble just as you came in. I should like to have a little more light—you know I always crave for plenty of light—and Hannah has a superstition that one candle and a fire is all that should be allowed in a bedroom.'

Mrs. Wynburn smiled, lit another candle, and asked Hannah to bring the little lamp from her own room. Hannah brought the lamp, and went down to the study with good news for Mr. Dunning. The widow was left alone with her daughter.

There was silence in the cheery little room for some minutes. Mrs. Wynburn stood by the bed—gentle and tender, yet quiet and undemonstrative—smoothing Sophie's pillow, putting her hair back from her forehead, answering her smiles and half-shy glances, and feeling far, far too happy for words. Presently Sophie raised her head a little, laid her hand on her mother's with a touch that thrilled through the widow's whole frame, and said in a voice that was strange and yet familiar, that had effort in it, and yet was full of tenderness :

‘ Will you kiss me, mother, and forgive me ?’

* * * * *

No more words ; only a mother's kiss—a long, long, passionate kiss—and Mary Wynburn felt her child's love steal through her lips into her very soul.

‘ Thank God !’ she said in her heart ; and she did well to be thankful.

THEO'S ESCAPE.

A STUDY FROM LIFE.

' Most illogical
Irrational nature of our womanhood,
That blushes one way, feels another way,
And prays, perhaps, another !'

E. B. BROWNING: *Aurora Leigh.*

CHAPTER I.

ON THE QUARTER-DECK.

' In truth
To mould denial to a pleasing shape
In all things, and most specially in love,
Is a hard task ; alas ! I have not wit
From such a sharp and waspish word as " no "
To pluck the sting.'

Philip Van Artevelde.

MR. SEPTIMUS DAVIDSON was the principal of the Commercial School, Woodgreve Hall, Woodgreve, near Market-Studley. He was one of those unfortunate men with whom, for some non-apparent

reason, nothing seems to thrive. He had been a tutor in private families up to the time of his marriage; afterwards he had for some years been second master at a grammar school in the North of England. Then he had taken the tumble-down old house known as Woodgreve Hall, and started a school on his own account. He had been very sanguine as to his success. This was fourteen years ago; the success had never come, but Mr. Davidson was still sanguine.

Mrs. Davidson, his wife, was a gentle little woman, with weak eyes and a weak spine, who spent most of her time in sewing long seams, and putting new collars and wristbands to old shirts. Like her husband, she was of a very hopeful nature, and, like him, she rarely lost either her spirits or her temper. Her daughter Theodosia was of opinion that it would have been better for the household generally if placidity had *not* been quite such a distinguishing trait of her mother's character. But Theo had never expressed this opinion—she was much too loyal a daughter to forget herself so far as that.

Five daughters and two sons had been born to Mr. and Mrs. Davidson: of these, Theo was the eldest.

Theo was now in her twenty-fifth year. She had large soft eyes, full of tenderness and sweetness, the colour of health was on her lip and cheek, and, when

she was at her best—not *over-worn* by her numerous cares and worries—she had gentle womanly ways that were very winning.

Of late Theo had been pondering a new idea very deeply as she went about her daily duties. Things had not been going on quite so well as usual at Woodgreve Hall. Soon after the Christmas holidays one of the boarders had had a bad attack of scarlatina, Theo's twin-brothers, Tom and Rupert, stout lads of fifteen, had caught the infection, three of the boarders had been withdrawn in consequence, and many of the day-scholars from Market-Studley had been taken away. These things had happened nearly three months ago. The little boarder and the twins were as strong as ever, the house had been purified, fresh advertisements inserted in the county papers and the *Market-Studley Gazette*, but in vain. Only five boarders and eight day-scholars took their places in the schoolroom at Woodgreve Hall these fine spring mornings.

'We shall not be able to go on much longer at this rate,' Theo said to herself one April afternoon, as she sat alone in her own room casting up the monthly bills—'certainly we cannot go on much longer; the bills get larger and larger every month. I suppose it must be because the children are growing and they eat more; and as for shoes, there are new ones

wanted, and old ones to be mended every week ; and there is that bill for our winter things unpaid yet, and that childish thoughtless Ada has ordered a new jacket, and dear old mother has scarcely a gown to put on. I am sure that shabby gray alpaca is not fit to go to church in again ; and then there's that milk-bill that has been standing ever so long, and Patty's wages will be due in a few days. . . . You must do it, Theo—there's nothing else to be done.'

This last imperative sentence was an allusion to her long-premeditated plan of going as a governess.

'Of course it is quite useless to imagine that I should ever be as happy anywhere as I am here,' said Theo, leaving her room and sauntering up and down the long, carpetless, rat-haunted passage outside. 'I don't think there ever was such another dear old place as this.' Then Theo sat down on one of the broad window-sills, and looked out over the back lawn, and watched the little river gliding through the trees at the end, and then her eyes wandered over the fields and trees and hedges beyond, and away to the long blue line of wolds that skirted the horizon. 'No,' said Theo ; 'I don't think I can ever meet with such another dear old place ; but one cannot always think of one's self first.'

Tea was over. Daylight had faded, the curtains had been drawn, the lamp brought in, the fire stirred

into a blaze. The children were in bed, all but the pale, delicate little three-years-old 'baby,' who was lying asleep on the sofa. Mr. Davidson was reading 'Pickwick' in a subdued voice; Mrs. Davidson was cutting out collars for Tom and Rupert; Theo was turning an old dress for her mother; Ada was rearranging the photographs in her album.

Presently Mr. Davidson put down his book and threw his head back against the top of his chair as if he were about to indulge in a nap.

'Don't go to sleep, please, papa,' said Theo; 'I want to—to say something.'

'Yes, my dear, yes! What is it, Theo—anything important? If it is anything about housekeeping or money worries, do put it off till to-morrow morning: I don't like to be troubled with those sort of things of an evening; and it isn't good for mamma—she never sleeps well after talking of these tiresome subjects. And we cannot do any good by talking. Things are not very bright with us just now, I know; but we cannot make them any better by turning them over and over until they look twice as bad as they are.'

'I quite agree with all that, papa,' said Theo, a little nervously; 'but I have a scheme in my head that I think will do us good. I have been thinking lately that it would be a great help to you if you would let me go out as a governess.'

'*Theo!*' exclaimed the startled mother.

'My dear *Theo!*' said Ada.

Mr. Davidson only laughed—a long, low, easy laugh, that was most provoking.

'Don't laugh at me, please,' said *Theo*. 'I have been thinking about it for weeks; and I feel almost sure that it would be for the best. Things cannot go on much longer as they are doing now—the bills are getting quite terrible. And you know there are seven of us, papa, and I am the eldest; it seems to me that it is my duty to do something.'

'Do! you are always doing: the house would go to rack and ruin without you, child. Remember how delicate your poor dear mamma is.'

'I believe I have remembered everything; but surely Ada could take my place; she would soon be able to do all that I do. Please think of it, papa.'

'I shall do nothing of the kind, my dear. Not another word, not another word. . . . Ah! that's Harvey's step. Put his chair ready, *Theo*. Come in, old fellow; that's right. Glad to see you.'

The gentleman irreverently addressed as 'old fellow,' was the Rev. Christopher Harvey, perpetual curate of Kirby-cum-Swynnerstone. He had for many years been a firm friend to Mr. Septimus Davidson; and of late years he had come to be looked upon as a friend of the family. Even Ada acknowledged that

Mr. Harvey was 'the dearest old man that ever lived.' Perhaps to Ada, who was only nineteen, Mr. Harvey, who was somewhere between forty and fifty, did seem 'an old man,' and then he looked considerably older than he was in reality. His hair was dark and plentiful, but it was not unmixed with gray, and his face was very deeply marked with lines of thought. A grave, kindly face it was—one that people trusted involuntarily; and little children clung to him wherever he went. Perhaps his tender smile, his soft gray eyes, and his low musical voice were enough to win the love of the little ones.

'You're just a few minutes too late, Harvey,' said Mr. Davidson, in a jocular tone. 'If you had come in a trifle earlier you would have heard something that would have astonished you.'

'Indeed! What has been going on?'

'Nothing *very* dreadful; only Miss Theo there is tired of us, and wants to go out governessing.'

'Nonsense, Theo!' said Mr. Harvey, turning round suddenly with a surprised, earnest look on his face.

Theo looked up, and as her eyes met his she wondered how far he would sympathize with her wish if he knew all. She was just a little grieved by her father's manner. How could he be so thoughtless and careless, she wondered for a moment, and then she reproached herself for her unfilial thought;

but at the same time, she longed for someone who could understand and advise her. Perhaps Mr. Harvey perceived something of this longing, for Theo's face was expressive, and it was much less bright than usual; and when she spoke her voice was almost sad.

'No, it isn't nonsense, Mr. Harvey,' she said. 'It is not quite fair to say that I am tired of anyone or anything; but I do wish to be a governess—I wish it very much indeed.'

'Then for once, my dearest Theo,' said Mr. Davidson, 'I must play the tyrant—I must deny your very strong wish, so don't let me ever hear it so much as alluded to again, there's a dear girl. And now let us change the subject. How are the new schools getting on, Harvey?'

Time passed on, and with the exception of one or two feeble little jokes from Mr. Davidson no further notice was taken of Theo's proposition. Mr. Harvey came in the evening as usual, sat for an hour or two in the cosy drawing-room, talking—sometimes gravely, sometimes in a quietly humorous way, and now and then sitting with his head leaning upon his hand, as if absorbed in thought, for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour at a time, apparently unconscious of everything that was going on around. But the family at

Woodgreve Hall were accustomed to Mr. Harvey's odd little ways; nobody noticed that these fits of abstraction were becoming more frequent, or that at such times his eyes were never far from Theo's round, rosy face, or her nimble fingers, or that he spoke to her more rarely than to the others, or that when he did speak to her his voice had different tones in it. Theo was quite as unconscious of these things as the rest—as unconscious and insensible as most people are till 'the inly touch of love' awakens within them that fore-glancing intuition which can never be quieted into dreamless sleep again.

One evening, about three weeks after the failure of her plans, Theo was rather more tired than usual. It had been baking-day; and Patty had been cross; and Theo had had all the housework to do; so instead of sitting down to her sewing as usual, she sauntered out into the garden for a few minutes. A lovely evening it was. A pink glow spread all over the sky; birds stirred and twittered in the branches; the laburnums drooped over the dark yew hedge; the lilac trees threw out a delicious fragrance; late primroses and violets nestled at the roots of the old trees; the air was still and clear and cool. 'Delightful it is,' said Theo, 'after that hot kitchen, and the stuffy little back parlour.' This was one of Theo's stolen moments—very precious they were. She took a book from her pocket,

and, seating herself on the children's swing, began rocking herself slowly to and fro and trying to read. The attempt was vain. The luxury of being surrounded by perfect peace and beauty was too great to be slighted.

Then a footstep was heard on the path behind. 'One of those tiresome boys, I suppose,' said Theo, without looking round. Presently a hand was laid gently on her shoulder. Theo turned; it was neither Tom nor Rupert, but the Rev. Christopher Harvey.

'Oh, Mr. Harvey; is that you? Do you want me? How did you know I was here?'

'Three questions all in a breath, Theo!' said Mr. Harvey slowly, and with his peculiarly sweet smile. 'Well, you may make one "Yes" do for an answer to the first two; and as for the last, it was Ada who told me that I should find you somewhere about the garden.'

Theo had risen from her seat on the swing—she was standing by the pathway under an old elm-tree. Bending toward her, Mr. Harvey took her hand in his, and looked tenderly into her face: 'Will you come down with me to the Quarter-deck?' he said gently.

Once, many years ago, Woodgreve Hall had belonged to an old admiral, whose heart had yearned seaward to the last day of his life. This gentleman had built a terrace down by the side of the shallow

little river—a terrace with a low stone wall and steps leading down to the water-side. Here he had spent his evenings : pacing up and down ; listening to the lapping of the water against the foot of the wall ; to the sound of the breezes sighing and surging, or tossing and roaring amongst the trees ; and fancying himself out upon the wild wind-swept ocean. Thus had the terrace come to be called the ‘ Quarter-deck.’ The low wall was broken now ; stones had rolled into the river and left great gaps, over which sprays of ivy were climbing and twining ; and the steps had all but disappeared.

For a few minutes Theo and Mr. Harvey walked up and down in silence. Here and there a bird was still twittering in the boughs ; the little river murmured on ; the young leaves fluttered in the evening breeze ; the pink cloudlets floated overhead ; and across the distant wolds soft, many-tinted shadows were stealing.

Then Mr. Harvey stopped at one end of the Quarter-deck, and rested his hand on a low branch of the laburnum-tree that grew near. The yellow blossoms drooped and trembled over Theo’s head ; there was also a little trembling going on within. ‘ What did it all mean ? Why was Mr. Harvey still holding her hand in his ? What was he going to tell her ?’

Some more minutes passed in silence. When Mr. Harvey spoke, his voice was grave and low and sweet as before; and in his soft gray eyes there was the same tender, thoughtful expression; yet his first words were only commonplace: 'I suppose you have given up your idea of leaving home, Theo?' he said.

'Yes,' Theo replied half sadly, all the old cares and worries coming back with a rush; 'yes, I have given it up. I was obliged to do so. You heard what papa said.'

'Yes; I heard: I think he was right. No father, worthy of the name, will permit his daughters to go from under his roof-tree to earn their bread except in cases of absolute necessity.'

'But you will allow that there may be cases where the necessity is absolute.'

'Undoubtedly—and unfortunately. But I trust it may never be your fate to prove it—certainly it never will if I can prevent it; and it may be that I can prevent even the possibility of it if I should be so happy as to win from you this evening a little ground to build hope upon. . . . Do not mistake me, Theo dear; I do not think it probable that you can have any feeling at all like love for me now. You have been accustomed to look upon me as your father's friend, and, in years, I am not so very much younger

than he; but I do not feel old, Theo, and I think I can love and hope quite as truly and deeply as any younger man can do, and I speak a simple truth when I say that my love for you has been growing for years. I do not at all expect that you can return it at once, just because you are asked to do so: all I hope for at present is that you will give me leave to win your love. I ask for no promise, no word of assurance. I can wait contentedly, if I may hope that I shall not wait *quite* in vain.'

Theo pressed her hand over her eyes with a sudden gesture as of one in pain.

'Oh, Mr. Harvey!' she said slowly, 'I am so sorry—so very sorry! I would rather that anything had happened than this. It can never be—never, never, not as you wish. I care for you more than for any other friend we have, but I never dreamed of this—never for a moment. Oh, I am so sorry!'

'Never, never, never.' With these words a great and solemn silence had fallen over the heart and soul of Christopher Harvey. He had spoken truly when he said that he had loved Theo Davidson for years. He had watched her growing up out of her childhood, self-denying, thoughtful, womanly, tender, spending her strength for others, forgetful or oblivious of her own ease or comfort, and doing whatever her hand found to do willingly and cheerfully. He had watched

her at first with admiration, and, all unknown to himself, his admiration had grown into love. It was strong love—strong and deep and tender; but he was a strong man, and capable of hiding it, and he might have done so to the end of his life if he had thought it best for Theo's sake. But of late he had come to believe that it might be better that he should speak out. He had seen that additional cares—burdens far too heavy for shoulders young as hers—had been laid upon her; and seeing this, pity had mingled with his love, adding great increase of strength to it, and adding also, it might be, something of life to his hopes. Now, however, this sweet spring evening the old hope and the new had alike been crushed out. 'Never, never, never!' It was like an echo. The water murmured 'never,' and the trees rustled 'never,' and the restless birds twittered 'never.' . . . A deep shadow fell across the forehead and into the pleading eyes of Christopher Harvey. No wonder that Theo Davidson, seeing it there, should say, 'Oh, I am so sorry!'

* * * * *

Then Mr. Harvey spoke again.

'Theo,' he said, 'there is no one else you care for, is there?'

'No,' Theo replied—'no one in the wide world.'

'And you remember how little I have asked for?'

'Yes, yes; I know. And you are so good that it pains me to refuse; but it would be wrong if I were to let you think that it could ever be. You will try to forget it all, will you not?—and please don't speak of it any more.'

'No, Theo, I will never speak of it again. But if you should ever change your mind, even in the slightest degree, tell me, or write to me, or let me know by some means. Even if it should be ten—ay, twenty—years after this, let me know. . . . Good-bye, Theo; may God bless you, child!'

Christopher Harvey stooped and kissed the hand he held—kissed it gently and tenderly and then he went away. Theo stood leaning against the wall of the Quarter-deck, watching the little river till she saw the young moon and the purple ether studded with stars reflected in its depths. What could she be thinking of, I wonder?

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE SIM'S LITTLE TEA-PARTY.

'*Messenger*. I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.

Beatrice. No: an he were, I would burn my study.'

Much Ado About Nothing.

Ay! what was Theo Davidson thinking of that evening? and what did she think of for many evenings

after? By what process of thought did she arrive at the uncomfortable conviction that she had made a grievous mistake? I cannot tell, I only know that it was so.

And with this conviction others came. It was like a great time of awakening. Longings for sympathy and love and rest: for someone who could talk to her sensibly and understand her easily; for someone to guide and lead her, and free her from the weariness of *always* having to guide and lead others—longings and cravings of this kind, such as Theo had never known before or at any rate had never indulged—came over her with renewed force every day. Not the less conscientiously did she fulfil her daily tasks, not the less frequently were her busy fingers employed; but her thoughts dwelt considerably less on the unpaid bills, and the household needs, than they had done hitherto. Not against day-dreams of auction sales and prisons had she to contend now; but against bright little pictures of the sweet, quiet, harmonious life that might have been hers as the mistress of Swynnerstone Parsonage. Against perpetual thoughts of one whom she felt that she had never known or understood in the least until that evening when he stood by her on the Quarter-deck, pleading in such soft, low, tender tones that the very memory of them was sweet. ‘Oh, why had she been

so impetuous? so obstinately decisive?' she asked herself. She had been taken by surprise, it was true, but why had she not asked for time, or rather accepted it when it was offered to her, so that she might have found out what there really was in that foolish self-ignorant heart of hers? As for doing what Mr. Harvey had begged her to do—letting him know that her feelings toward him had changed: or, rather, that the old roots of her respect and reverence for him had thrown out new blossoms of sympathy and love—to let him know this was impossible. No; she had made a mistake, a mistake so grievous that she should never forget it, but she could not bring herself to unmake it. Perhaps as the years went on, the gray dreary years, she would come to think of what she had done with less pain; at any rate she would try to hope so, and in the meantime, she would try to be brave, to keep her merriest smiles and her silliest jokes for the times when her heartache was keenest.

And so life went on at Woodgreve Hall till the midsummer holidays. Mr. Harvey came and went as usual, sitting in his own special chair, chatting pleasantly, or thinking silently, without attracting a moment's notice from anyone but Theo. Mrs. Davidson's health was improving. During the

holidays, arrangements were made for the coming of five new boarders; and several day scholars were promised. Things were beginning to look brighter for the family generally; as for poor Theo, her grief for the error she had fallen into went deeper every day.

The holidays were drawing to a close. One morning a strange, old-fashioned looking letter arrived, addressed to Mr. Davidson. That gentleman was sitting at the breakfast-table when the post came in. He opened the epistle, glanced at the handwriting, and, in a tone of much surprise, exclaimed: 'Only think, my dear, a letter from Uncle Sim!'

Uncle Sim, or Mr. Simeon Davidson, was the schoolmaster's only brother. To his nephews and nieces, with the exception of Theo, he was altogether a traditional personage; a hero of adventures more daring and exciting than those of any other hero who had ever lived. He had left school and run away to sea at the age of fourteen; he had never once been heard of during the twenty years that followed; and, when he turned up again with a red beard, a sunburnt face, and a long, improbable story, he had found it somewhat difficult to establish his identity. Theo was quite a little girl when Uncle Sim came back from his two years' sojourn on a desolate island in the South Pacific; but she had

remembered his wonderful stories, and repeated them to the little ones till they were almost as familiar with them as with the 'Adventures of Robinson Crusoe.'

Letters from Uncle Sim were very rare: he had only written three or four times to his brother since that memorable visit; and each time his letter had contained some important announcement. The first had informed them of his marriage, and of the fact that he was going out to India as captain of the barque *Galatea*, belonging to Muir Brothers and Esthwaite, of Holmsyke-Ness. Then followed a silence of nearly seven years, which was broken by the sad news that Uncle Sim had fallen into the hold of the *Galatea* and had broken his leg. The fracture was a severe one, the attendant surgeon incompetent, and the captain had been told on his arrival at home that he would never be fit for sea again. This was a grief—a great grief to him. Not that money was needed—his wife had not come to him empty-handed, they had no children, and the captain had not been more extravagant than sailors are generally supposed to be—but he could not bear the aimless, unexciting life that he was compelled to live ashore. After bearing it as well as he could for a year or two, the old foreman at the Dockyard had died, and Muir Brothers and Esthwaite had offered the vacant post

to Captain Davidson. It was not what he would have chosen had he been an able-bodied man, but, under existing circumstances, he had accepted it gladly; and he and his wife had spent some very happy years at the cottage in the Dockyard.

Then—about a year previous to the time of which I write—Mr. Davidson had received from his brother a black-bordered envelope containing a card: on this card, which was elaborately embossed with weeping willows and inverted torches, was an announcement of the death of Maria Hannah, the beloved wife of Simeon Davidson. Letters of condolence had been written by Mr. Davidson and Theo, but, until the arrival of the sheet of blue letter-paper, folded and sealed, without an envelope, to which I have already alluded, the family at Woodgreve Hall had heard nothing more of Uncle Sim.

When Mr. Davidson had read the letter, his surprise appeared to be crossed by some other sensation; he looked puzzled, and for a few minutes he seemed to be almost lost in thought. This was unusual; it excited curiosity.

‘Anything wrong, Septimus dear?’ inquired Mrs Davidson.

‘Wrong, my dear! no, nothing wrong; only peculiar, very peculiar. I don’t know what to think of it.

There, read the letter for yourself, and then pass it on to Theo and Ada.'

The letter ran thus :

'MY DEAR BROTHER AND SISTER,

'Being one of those people who aren't given to writing unless they've something to say, it so happens that it is now eight years, or thereabouts, since I took my pen in hand to write to you. I hope things have been going pretty smooth with you in the meantime : I had nothing to complain of myself till poor Maria Hannah died. But since that time I can't say I've liked the taste of life altogether ; what with long evenings, and raw beefsteaks, and a small scrap of a servant-maid with two left hands, it's been a roughish getting on I've had, and I am beginning to tire of it, and to cast about for chances of something better. A day or two ago it came into my head that your family must be getting up now, and I've been wondering since if you had a spare daughter that would like a change of air for a year or two. If so, I should think she might make herself very comfortable at the Dockyard Cottage ; and (having no family of my own) it might be to her benefit in more ways than one. There, I've made my proposal ; you can think of it, and let me know in the course of a few days what sort of shape your thoughts have taken.

It is no great distance from Holmsyke-Ness to Market-Studley—twenty or thirty miles, maybe—and I would have come over if I had been able to leave the dock, which I can't do just at present ; but, as I was saying, it's no great distance, and if you liked to send one or two of your daughters over to take the bearings of the place before deciding, perhaps you would feel more satisfied.

‘Your affectionate brother,
‘SIMEON DAVIDSON.’

‘Very peculiar,’ said Mrs. Davidson. Theo made no remark at all. Ada declared that she had never read such an unrefined epistle in her life: she couldn't think how it was possible for her father's brother to write in such an ungentlemanly manner as that.

‘Of course, papa, you will tell him that we could not think of such a thing,’ she concluded.

‘I don't know, my dear, I don't know,’ said Mr. Davidson. ‘Putting other considerations aside, it wouldn't do for us to run the risk of losing your uncle's goodwill. I have reason to believe that your Aunt Maria's fortune was by no means a small one; and Dutton told me years ago that in case of her death it would be left entirely in my brother's hands. We mustn't decide in a hurry, my dear Ada. . . . What is your opinion, Miss Theo?’

‘I agree with you, papa ; it is not a thing to be decided either way without consideration.’

For the remainder of that week, Uncle Sim's proposal was the chief topic of conversation at Woodgreve Hall. Mr. and Mrs. Davidson changed their minds with almost every hour of every day. Thinking at one time that it would be better to run all risks of offending Uncle Sim than to part with either of their daughters ; and then — remembering their debts, their children's future, and Aunt Maria's fortune, they would agree that at any rate it would be as well to comply with Captain Davidson's desire so far as to let the girls go over for a day or two. Mr. Harvey, who was appealed to as a matter of course, said a few words commiserative of Uncle Sim's loneliness, but left the grand question of relieving it exactly where it stood before. Ada gave her opinion freely from the first, and held by it to the last. ‘Nothing should induce her to go to live at the Dockyard Cottage,’ she said. Theo, who had foreseen how matters were likely to end, said as little as possible, and employed her leisure hours in preparing her scanty wardrobe. When this was done, she asked her father if he would write and tell Uncle Sim that she and Ada would go over to Holmsyke-Ness for two days at the beginning of the following week. Mr. Davidson was taken by surprise ; it was acting so very impetuously, he said,

but he yielded to his daughter's wish : unknown to himself, he was in the habit of doing so.

In reply to Mr. Davidson's ambiguous and uncertain letter of several pages, Uncle Sim returned a note containing these words :

'All right, old boy. Tell the girls I will be at the station. I shall most probably recognise them, as very few people get out here : if I don't, tell them to look out for a lameter with a stick, and red whiskers, and a white hat with a black hatband : such being the appearance presented by your

'Affectionate brother,

'SIM DAVIDSON.'

True to this promise, Uncle Sim had been sauntering up and down the platform nearly an hour when the 2.30 P.M. train arrived at Holmsyke-Ness. Theo stepped out of the carriage first, and turned to help Ada ; then Uncle Sim came forward, and a rather embarrassing recognition took place. Almost for the first time in his life, Uncle Sim felt shy ; he had not been prepared to welcome two fine ladies—and such his nieces appeared to him at that moment. He did not notice that Ada's blue silk dress was much faded, or that her white straw hat was sunburnt ; neither

did he know that Theo's dress had been 'scoured,' or that the pretty rose-coloured feather in her hat had been re-dyed again and again. Poor Uncle Sim knew nothing of all this; he saw what seemed to him stylish and fashionable toilettes: Ada's long drooping curls, her pretty childish face, and Theo's gentle manners and graceful movements; and seeing these things only, he began to feel ill at ease.

But Uncle Sim was not a man to give way to his feelings; he began to talk, to ask questions about his brother's family, to explain things concerning himself; and appeared to be quite unconscious of the fact that his peculiarities of accent and phraseology were the causes of the smiles and blushes that lent so much beauty to Ada's face. Perhaps Miss Ada might be pardoned for daring to laugh at her hero uncle, for, truth to tell, his usual mode of utterance was amusing in an eminent degree. It would have been difficult to guess even his nationality from his language. Indeed, his native Yorkshire was so overlaid with scraps of the Scotch, Irish, and North Durham dialects, and with tricks of broken English caught in foreign ports, and from foreign sailors, that his conversation was not always intelligible to strangers.

The distance from the station to the Dockyard was considerable; but the idea of engaging the solitary cab that went to and fro between the King George

and the station thrice a day never entered Captain Davidson's mind; and, much to Ada's distress, he insisted upon carrying the small box, that constituted their luggage, himself. All down the streets, through the market-place, across the bridge, and up the long lane that led to 'Muir's Dock' did Uncle Sim persist in cartying that unfortunate box; talking to his nieces in louder and more familiar tones as his shyness wore off, and passing a joke or a pleasant word to everyone he met. Ada felt that her small white ears and her pink cheeks were getting very hot before they were fairly through the town.

At last, however, they came to the long line of black palings that skirted the Dockyard. There was a clatter of carpenters' hammers, a smell of boiling tar-kettles, and a clanking of cranes and other machinery. The bowsprit of a large barque that was in the dock stretched across the road outside; a figure-head—a gilt and white 'Juno'—stared blankly at the passers-by. On the opposite side of the road were trees and fields, and away in the distance quite a pretty stretch of country was seen, with blue haze hiding a long, wood-crowned upland, and the river gliding on like a silver thread. Here and there in the foreground were some nice-looking villas surrounded by trees; and, alas! alas! close at hand, behind the much-blistered, tar-covered palings, was

the dingy-looking red-brick house known as the 'Dockyard Cottage.'

'And now ya must make yerselves at home, young ladies, take care of dat,' said Captain Davidson as they entered the little parlour. 'Dere's no one ta look after ya now. What'll ya have ta eat? dat will be deh first thing, I'm thinking. Where's dat girl, I wonder?—Becky, come here! Dere, young ladies, dat is my establishment; dere is my cook and house-keeper, and parlour-maid and kitchen-maid. Come in, Becky; don't be shy!' And thus invited, Becky, a small odd-looking girl of fourteen, came in, and blushed and curtsied, and received her orders, and went away looking quite perplexed. 'I wonder whether I shall ever make anything of such a child as that?' thought Theo to herself as she and Ada went upstairs.

The doors of two very bright-looking little rooms were standing open on the narrow landing above. From the front-room window there was a view of the Dockyard; and through the tall masts and rigging of the stately *Juno* a sweep of the blue distant sea dotted all over with tiny, swift-moving white sails was visible. From the window of the room behind there was a pretty river view, with trees, and cornfields, and farmsteads in the distance; and the piece of ground close to the cottage was luxuriant with fruit-

trees and rose-trees; and the little window was overgrown with the neglected ivy that covered the cottage wall. Like the parlour below, these apartments might have been mistaken for miniature museums, so full they were of the curious odds and ends, the lumps of coral, the strange shells and feathers, and the japanned wooden bowls that Uncle Sim had picked up when he was 'out forran.'

'What strange things they are!' said Ada, flitting from one room to the other; 'and what peculiar taste Aunt Maria must have had to arrange them so. If you *do* come back to stay awhile with Uncle Sim, Theo, you must make some alterations. And I should have this little back room if I were you—you would never get a moment's sleep in the other after that horrid knocking and hammering had begun; and I dare say the men begin as soon as it is daylight.'

That same afternoon, about five o'clock, Captain Davidson was showing his nieces over the garden, and the Dockyard, and the barque that was in the dock, explaining things in language that required far more explanation than any of the things they saw. 'And now, girls,' he said, 'I must go in and smarten myself up a bit, for I've asked a friend or two ta tea, an' I expec' dey'll be here by six o'clock or so.'

Theo and Ada exchanged little looks of dismay. Uncle Sim saw them and understood them.

'No need to be alarmed,' he said; 'only a couple of old friends o' mine—Mr. Broxon, our principal sail-maker, and his missis, an' Mr. Ralph Esthwaite, our junior partner. I asked deh two Miss Muirs to come, but Mr. Peter isn't well to-day—he'd one of his bad fits last night, an' Miss Muir never leaves him when he's ill. Miss Bertha may come, maybe: she's only a youngster—sixteen or thereabouts.'

'What is Mr. Esthwaite like, Uncle Sim?' asked Ada.

'What's he like? well, I can't say, exactly—like nothing, nor nobody but himself, I should think; a dour-hearted, long-headed, crabbed sort o' fellow; might be known for a Yorkshireman anywheres. He ain't bad company, though, in a reg'lar way; an' he's had a deal o' education: but you'll be able to judge for yourselves by-an'-by. He ain't married, Missom, and he ain't engaged. Dere *was* a talk of something atween him and Miss Muir; but dat's all off again. Why or wherefore, I'll no say.'

In nothing was the difference between Theo and Ada more remarkable than in the different degree of enjoyment they found in 'the horrible pleasure of pleasing inferior people.' Theo felt rather strange as she took her place at the head of the tea-table in

the little parlour ; but she felt nothing of the silly dread and discomfort that were visible in Ada's every look and movement. Theo's strangeness vanished very quickly, and she chatted and made herself most agreeable. Uncle Sim was in high spirits ; so was Mr. Broxon, who sat with a large, many-coloured silk handkerchief spread over his trousers, eating hot buttered cake with much appetite, and drinking tea noisily from his saucer with most evident satisfaction. Mrs. Broxon, a comfortable-looking little woman, with a pink face, short curls of suspicious smoothness, a black satin dress, and a blond cap trimmed with water-lilies, sat next to Ada, and talked so long and so volubly of her neighbours, and her minister, and her servant, of fashions, of tracts, and of patent medicines, that her listener grew weary, and began to wish that Miss Bertha Muir had come, or that Mr. Ralph Esthwaite would make his appearance. That gentleman had sent word that he was engaged—he would look in after tea.

When Becky had taken away the tray and the tea-kettle, Uncle Sim and Mr. Broxon drew two long clay pipes from behind the mirror on the mantel-shelf ; and having filled the said pipes with tobacco, they went out of doors for half an hour. During this time little Mrs. Broxon chatted more incessantly than ever ; it was delightful to have two listeners who

knew nothing whatever of Holmsyke-Ness, or the Dockyard, or the Muirs, or Mr. Esthwaite, or of anything or anybody. 'If you *do* come to live here, my dear,' the little woman said to Ada, 'I shall be delighted to introduce you to our minister, and to some of the congregation. I know all the principal people that attend Kingston Street Chapel.'

Ada looked distressed.

'We don't know yet whether either of us will come to stay here for awhile,' she said; 'if anyone does it will be my sister, and—and we go to church, Mrs. Broxon, always.'

'*No!* my dear, surely not—and your uncle such a reg'lar attender at Kingston Street as he is! Surely, surely you don't mean to say that you have been brought up to go to church?'

'Yes, we have, indeed!' said Theo, with a smile that did much to soften the little woman's disappointment.

'Really, really! Well, then, in that case I should say you'll have to go with the Miss Muirs—you won't like going alone at first, you know—and you can sit in their pew. They are church people, and I've nothing against them. I've allus liked Miss Chrissie—that's the eldest—and I feel quite sorry for her, poor thing! She has a hard life of it, in spite of all their riches.'

'Has she? What makes her life hard?' asked Theo, wondering for a moment how anyone could have *very* much trouble who had plenty of money.

'More things than one, my dear—more things than one,' said Mrs. Broxon. 'I often think when I go by that grand house o' theirs—which I believe you can see from this very window, if you stand on a stool; yes, of course you can—there it is, that white stone one peeping out above the trees on the hillside, that's Oak Hill. Well, as I was sayin', when I go by that very house and see them grand new gates, and the lawn, and the flowers, an' the han'some curtains in the windows, an' everything 'at money can buy, and then remembers what they have to suffer that live within, I often think what a true sayin' it is, 'at riches can't buy happiness. I reckon Mr. Peter Muir would give half o' what he's worth to be free from them epileptic fits 'at he has so bad.'

'Is he an old man?' asked Ada.

'Yes, my dear, quite old—getting well on for seventy, I should say; an' he's been afflicted like that ever since afore his wife died; an' they say it was that as made Mrs. Muir get Miss Chrissie to promise never to marry as long as her father lived; an' Miss Chrissie did promise, only about an hour before her mother died, so I've been told. An' she's kept her promise, poor thing! an' she looks as if she was

breaking her heart to do it ; but, truth to tell, I don't believe Mr. Ralph Esthwaite has behaved anyways over-admirable in the matter.'

'Hasn't he?'

'No, he hasn't; that is, not according to my thinking. Not 'at he's behaved anyways unhonourable—he's too much of a gentleman for that—but he might ha' been kinder and ha' been no worse for it. They were engaged from the time that Miss Chrissie was eighteen—that was two years afore her mother died—and they kept up the engagement for a matter o' three or four years after her death; and then, because Miss Muir wouldn't break her promise, Mr. Esthwaite must needs break off the engagement. That was years ago, and ever since then they've treated each other just like mere acquaintance when they've met. And, hey! but she is altered. Time was, I remember, when she was like a rose, an' now she's more like a storm-beaten lily. But then, you see, she's a deal of other things to try her. She has the management o' that big house, and of all them servants. And Mr. Johnson Muir lives with them too; and both him an' Mr. Peter is very odd-tempered. I've heard say 'at nothing Miss Chrissie does ever pleases both of 'em. And then Miss Bertha's rather wild, I'm afraid; an' she had a flighty young governess 'at made her wilder, an' now Miss Chrissie teaches her herself; so I leave

you to guess whether she's plenty on her hands or not.'

'Poor thing!' said Theo. 'I wonder whether Mr.——'

Probably Theo was about to make some conjecture concerning Mr. Ralph Esthwaite, but the appearance of that gentleman's tall, straight figure and fierce-looking moustache at the parlour-door prevented her.

'Is Captain Davidson within?' he inquired, with a courteous bow and a quick glance of surprise.

'Come in, Mr. Esthwaite,' said little Mrs. Broxon, in a comfortable tone; 'come yer ways in, and sit down. These is the Captain's nieces, Miss Davidson and Miss Ada; the Captain is somewheres about the yard smoking a pipe with Mr. Broxon. P'raps you'd like to join 'em: I dare say I can find a pipe for you if you would.'

'Thank you, I don't smoke,' said Ralph Esthwaite, somewhat bluntly.

'Don't you now, dear me! then I'll just put on my bonnet an' go an' tell them 'at you've come.'

'Don't trouble, Mrs. Broxon,' said Ralph Esthwaite, rising to go himself; but just at that moment Captain Davidson and Mr. Broxon passed the garden window and came in at the back-door.

'How do, Mr. Esthwaite, how do?' said the Cap-

tain. 'I haven't seen you about deh yard much to-day, I think.'

'No; I have been at the High Street office since morning. As usual, I suppose, I must give an eye to matters there as long as Mr. Peter is ill.'

Twilight was fast closing in by this time, and Captain Davidson, who loved the glow of firelight, and could bear a high temperature, insisted that it was a chill evening, and would have Becky in to light the fire. Then the gas was lit, and a decanter of whisky produced, and sweet cakes and raspberry-wine for the ladies. Little Mrs. Broxon grew more communicative than ever over the raspberry-wine, and talked as fast, if not quite as loud, as Mr. Broxon and Captain Davidson over the whisky and hot water. Theo and Mr Esthwaite talked in a more subdued manner, but, considering their short acquaintance, they seemed to touch upon an amazing variety of mutually interesting topics. More than once Ralph Esthwaite's round, dark eyes were fixed on Theo's face with an expression that was half surprise and half admiration; and Miss Theo, who had a curious vein of shrewd perception in her simple character, appeared to be studying the peculiarities of her interlocutor with unusual interest.

When the sisters went upstairs that evening, they sat down as usual for a chat; but, strange to say,

they sat for several minutes without speaking. Ada was wondering whether Theo could possibly make up her mind to live at the Dockyard Cottage : the nature of Theo's thoughts will appear presently.

Ada was the first to speak.

'Theo dear, how *could* you go on talking to that odious man for such a length of time this evening? I was wondering all the while what you could possibly find to say.'

'What odious man are you speaking of, dear?'

'Oh, Theo! how can you? you know very well who I mean—that Mr. Esthwaite. Don't pretend that you think he isn't the vainest, horridest, most disagreeable man you ever met.'

'Vain he may be—I think he *is*, just a little; in fact, I was just deciding the point when you spoke. As to his being horrid or disagreeable, there I venture to differ from you; but we won't quarrel about that. What age should you say he is?'

'Thirty-five.'

'Yes; I should think he is—thirty-five, if not more.'

'What are you thinking so much about him for, Theo?' inquired Ada, with some annoyance in her tone.

'I can't tell, Ada . . . I should say he is one

of those men who attract or repel almost everyone they meet.'

'So should I; repel as a rule, attract in exceptional cases. I am not an exceptional case.'

'Neither am I.'

'But you will be if you come to live here. I can see it all as plainly as possible.'

'Not so fast, Ada dear; you forget!'

'No, I don't forget; but I think it very probable that you may. Dear old Mr. Harvey! Oh, Theo dear, I do wish you hadn't been so blind! you would have been so happy.'

There was another pause; and then, to Ada's distress, she saw that tears were dropping slowly over Theo's cheeks: this was such a rare occurrence that Ada, who was tender-hearted, began to cry too. Comfortings and explanations followed; and then Ada no longer wondered that her sister was so eager to get away from Woodgreve.

'Oh, Theo darling! I never knew you cared so much as that,' she said.

Next evening Uncle Sim, Theo, and Ada went out for a stroll round the Dockyard. The hammers were silent, the workmen had gone, the fires under the tar-kettles were out. The dry, white chippings of wood crackled as they walked on to the end of the dock, threading their way between tool-sheds, saw-

pits, piles of timber, rusted chains, and huge grindstones. Ada wondered much why Uncle Sim should prefer the Dockyard to the garden, but she did not express her wonder. Theo was trying to realize how very different her life would be from what it had been, how much less *present* care and anxiety she would have, and also how much less of the old home happiness, and thinking that it would have been very nice if Ada could have come to live with Uncle Sim too. Then they began to talk about the future; and Uncle Sim was very glad to hear that Theo had decided to come and stay with him for awhile. She should have everything she wished for, he said; and he would insist upon giving up to her there and then a large bunch of keys that had always been carried by Aunt Maria.

Theo laughed, and put them in her pocket.

'But I must give them to you again in the morning,' she said; 'you know, I am going back to Woodgreve with Ada to-morrow afternoon.'

'So you said, my dear—so you said; but I canna' see why you should. Can't Ada send yer other things by train?'

'Yes; she could send them, uncle; but I wish to go back—indeed, I must go for a few days.'

'I don't see why you need, Theo,' said Ada; 'you could tell me what you wish to have sent.'

Theo looked at Ada almost imploringly.

'I must go back,' she repeated.

Before starting next day, the girls went up to the town to buy some presents for the children. Uncle Sim had insisted upon this—and insisted, also, upon providing money to pay for them. Then he went to the station with his nieces, and took their tickets, and at parting slipped a piece of thin paper into Theo's hand, with a whispered intimation that she might buy something that would be useful for the younger ones.

'You can get anything you want for yourself when you come back to Holmsyke-Ness,' he said, with a smile, and an odd twinkle of satisfaction in his eye.

CHAPTER III.

A LOST OPPORTUNITY.

'It is the fate of a woman
Long to be patient and silent, to wait like a ghost that is speech-
less,

Till some questioning voice dissolves the spell of its silence.
Hence is the inner life of so many suffering women
Sunless and silent and deep, like subterranean rivers.'

LONGFELLOW.

AND now that all was settled and decided, Mr. and Mrs. Davidson were quite sure that Providence had

ordered things wisely. There were no regrets or repinings. Ada might feel a little secret dread of the lot that was to be hers, but no one heard much of it except her elder sister. Clara, who was a strong healthy girl of fourteen, and resembled Theo both in character and appearance, was delighted at the prospect of promotion: she was quite sure that she could help her mother almost as much as Theo had done; and little Louie, who was only nine, offered, in the most grave and dignified manner, to make the nursery beds, and dust the drawing-room on baking days. There was a sort of feeling throughout the family that poor Theo, who had worked so hard, and who had had so little pleasure, was going to have a 'good time,' and everybody was glad in a certain way, and tried not to think how dismal the house would be without Theo.

Before leaving Holmsyke-Ness, Theo had promised Uncle Sim that she would return in a fortnight. The days passed quickly; there was much to be done, for the school had recommenced, and the first week or two after the holidays were always busy ones at Woodgreve Hall. It was well for Theo, perhaps, that her thoughts and her time were thus occupied; for in her secret heart she was not happy. At first she had longed to go away; she had thought she could find rest and ease and peace away from Woodgreve.

It had come to be almost torture to her now to see Mr. Harvey coming and going; to hear his low, tender voice, and to watch his grave, kindly face for hours together of an evening, and to be thus reminded day by day of the life-long happiness that she had put away from herself. She could have borne it better, she thought, if he would have taken no notice of her; if he would have refrained from speaking to her, tried to ignore her very presence. It was pain—acute pain—to have to greet him when he came and went, and talk to him in careless tones and seem as if she had long ago forgotten that sweet spring evening on the Quarter-deck.

Many men would have found out all this very quickly—would have seen for themselves suspicious little changes in the looks and manners of Theo Davidson; but Mr. Harvey's nature had a large simplicity in it. He had taken Theo at her word, and nothing had happened since to make him watchful for any little sign that should restore his dead hopes. Theo knew all this instinctively, and she had thought that if she could go away for awhile, and interest herself in other things, and for other people, she might forget her trouble or outgrow it, as other people outgrew theirs.

And now that the last day but one had come, and she knew that she should only see Mr. Harvey once

or, at the most, twice before she left home, poor Theo felt very unlike her old self. There was a dull, sinking pain at her heart, and a dreary cloud over the future, that seemed to take the very brightness out of the sunshine and the flowers. Once or twice she had felt a little gleam of hope that Mr. Harvey *might* speak once again, and if he would say, oh, ever such a little, she would tell him how silly she had been; but these little gleams were fading out quickly now. Since it had been settled that she was to go to Holmsyke-Ness, it seemed to her that Mr. Harvey had been more provokingly and unmeaningly kind to her than he had ever been before; and now there was only one more evening.

Of course Mr. Harvey would come: there had never been the slightest doubt in Theo's mind all day about that; and when she came down to tea her mother and Ada saw with surprise that she had put on her Sunday dress—a pretty mauve-coloured *barège*—and that she had bright cherry-coloured ribbons in her hair, and a piece of cherry-coloured velvet round her neck with the little gold locket on it that Mr. Harvey had given her on her twenty-first birthday.

Mr. Davidson made little jokes as they sat at tea, and said that Theo evidently wished to leave a favourable impression behind her.

After tea, Theo sat down to her work, and her bright eyes grew brighter, and her rosy cheeks more rosy, and her heart throbbed a little, and her fingers flew even faster than usual, as she sat and listened for Mr. Harvey's footstep; but the evening went on—such a long evening it seemed to be—and Mr. Harvey did not come. As the clock struck nine Mr. Davidson expressed a little surprise at the non-appearance of his old friend; and then, unnoticed by anyone, the colour faded out of Theo's lips and cheeks a little, and her eyelids drooped, and her fingers moved more heavily. . . . Some tears fell into the little box where the gold locket was laid, and Theo cried herself to sleep that night.

The train by which it had been decided that Theo was to travel left Market-Studley a little before noon, so that her last morning at home was a very short one; but all the packings and preparations had been attended to the day before: nothing had been left till the last moment.

'Come with me for one more turn round the garden, Theo,' said Ada, with two big tears in her eyes just ready to fall, 'and we will get a few flowers for you to take to Holmsyke-Ness.'

The flowers had been gathered, and the sisters were walking arm-in-arm up the weedy path, when they

saw Mr. Harvey coming through the gate at the bottom of the drive.

‘Don’t run away, Ada,’ said Theo, in a hurried whisper.

‘I wasn’t thinking of it, dear. . . . Oh, Mr. Harvey, what lovely flowers! Surely these are not from the Parsonage garden?’

‘No, Ada dear, I got them at Trenholm Park. They are for Theo, if she will accept them.’

Theo took the flowers with low thanks and a grateful smile, and then she turned to go indoors. Mr. Harvey followed her into the empty drawing-room, Ada went into the little breakfast-parlour, where her mother was sitting.

‘So you are really going, Theo?’ Mr. Harvey said, with a half-sad smile, as he took her hand in his.

‘Yes, really. . . . I—I thought you would have come over last evening.’

‘Did you, dear?—did you expect me? I thought that, as it was your last evening at home, you would be glad to have it to yourselves.’

Theo murmured something that was not very intelligible, and then for a few minutes these two short-sighted people could find nothing more to say to each other. If Christopher Harvey had had the very slightest hope he would have spoken the words that once more trembled on his lips; but he could not

bring himself to do what he firmly believed would only cause fresh pain to himself and to the only being on earth who was very, very dear to him. It was a time of intensest pain to both; but I believe that Mr. Harvey suffered more keenly than Theo, yet no one could have guessed this from his look. Once his eyes met Theo's, and she thought that he could hardly have looked so good and gentle and peaceful if he had cared so *very* much about her going away. She was half angry with him, and yet she felt that she had never loved him so much as now. She told herself that she was very miserable, and that she always should be—even more miserable at Holmsyke-Ness than she would have been at home; for she would never see him, and she would have no more opportunities of trying to show him, in a thousand little ways, that the change he had once alluded to had come almost before she had forgotten the sound of his words. Then a quick, impulsive thought swept through her brain, and made her heart leap almost up to her throat, and then stand still. 'Why should she not tell him all about it, confess how blind she had been, and how she longed to make him happy; and how she believed that he was the best and noblest and truest-hearted man in the whole world? Oh! why would not the words come from her lips? Why did she stand trembling and hesitating like that when

she was so very, very sure of herself? Was it weakness not to dare to say what she felt? Or, if she did dare so to do, would she not all her life remember her unmaidenly words with stinging blushes and self-reproaches that no amount of happiness would suffice to soothe?’

Then Mr. Harvey began to fancy that Theo's hand—which he still held within his own—was trembling a little. Was it so, or was it a mere quiver of restlessness or impatience? He could not tell; and in his humility he feared it was the latter. ‘He would not detain her,’ he said; ‘he would wish her a pleasant journey, and a happy home at the end of it, and say good-bye.’ Then he kissed her hand again—tenderly and reverently, as he had done once before—and went away. Theo stood for a few minutes with her hands pressed tightly over her eyes to keep the tears back. She listened to the sound of Mr. Harvey's footsteps till it died away, to the dull, heavy thud of the wooden gate as he closed it after him; and then, with a wistful look at the sofa cushions, and a little promise to herself that she would have a good cry in the railway-carriage, she went with a smiling face to show her mother the beautiful bouquet that Mr. Harvey had brought from Trenholm Park.

Then the cab came, and Ada, who was going to the station, got into it, and pretended to be absorbed in

a book while the leave-takings were going on ; but when she heard Clara and Louie sobbing, and baby crying loudly for company's sake, and her mother trying to comfort everybody in a chirrupy little voice that sounded full of tears—she broke down too ; and even Patty, who was standing on the doorstep, was under the painful necessity of using the corner of her apron for abnormal purposes. Then Mr. Davidson came bustling up : ' They must start at once,' he said ; and Theo kissed the dear little mother once more, and told Clara and Louie, for the hundredth time, to be sure to take good care of her. . . . Poor little mother ! Before the cab was half-way down the village street she felt that she would gladly have forfeited all hope concerning Aunt Maria's fortune if she might have had her daughter back again.

CHAPTER IV.

AT OAK HILL.

' Ah ! the weariness and weight of tears,
The crying out to God, the wish for slumber,
They lay so deep, so deep ! God heard them all ;
He set them unto music of His own.'

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

THEO kept the promise that she had made to herself, and ' rained her skies blue ' long before she got to

Holmsyke-Ness. It would never do, she thought, to let Uncle Sim see that she had been crying; but Uncle Sim, although he was not remarkable for perspicaciousness, saw that his niece's eyes were swollen before he had said a dozen words to her. Uncle Sim was distressed. The idea that he had been the cause of misery enough to draw tears was quite terrible to him. 'Poor Missom!' he said to himself as they walked along by the black palings; 'if she don't get over it pretty soon, she shall go back again. I'll never be the one to keep her here if she ain't happy.'

But Uncle Sim's fears on this point were soon set at rest. Theo was one of those people whose power of adapting themselves speedily to external circumstances is almost marvellous. Whatever pain she might be enduring secretly, nothing of it was visible on the surface; and before many days were over she appeared to be as much at home in the Dockyard Cottage as if she had been there for years. Bright and busy she was every day and all day long. Becky had to be trained; there was cooking, and mending, and gardening to be done; long letters to be written home; little Mrs. Broxon's visit to be returned; and various new acquaintances to be made. Uncle Sim was proud of his niece, and lost no opportunity of explaining to everybody what a capital housewife she

was ; he congratulated himself many times a day on having carried out his felicitous idea.

During the second week of Theo's life at Holmsykeness it was reported that Mr. Peter Muir was convalescent ; and Mr. Esthwaite returned to the Dockyard office. Theo saw him passing about the yard frequently, and once or twice he entered the house to consult with Captain Davidson on business matters. His manner to Theo on these occasions was most courteous ; but there was a certain amount of stiffness and formality in it that she failed to understand.

One morning during this week the two Miss Muirs called at the Dockyard Cottage. Theo was at work in the garden when they came, potting geraniums to be kept indoors during the winter. Presently she heard a soft rustling behind her.

'Don't let me disturb you,' said a sweet voice ; 'I am Christine Muir, and this is Bertie. Your little maid is out, I think ; and seeing you in the garden, we ventured to come through the house.'

Theo was conscious of being slightly confused for a moment or two, but she soon recovered herself ; indeed, it would have been almost impossible for her to have kept up anything like shyness with the gentle, warm-hearted little Chrissie Muir. Rarely had Theo felt such a sudden and complete efflux of

sympathy. Something there was in the worn, faded little face before her that stirred the innermost depths of her heart—something pleading and pathetic and wistful—something that would have fascinated her, and won her love and compassion, she thought, if she had known nothing of the care and sorrow that had shaded Chrissie Muir's life.

Chrissie had passed the springtime of her youth—she was now in her thirtieth year—and anyone seeing her face in repose, unbrightened by smile or expression, might have thought that she was even older. Her hair was of a pale auburn colour; her eyes were gray, and there was in them an expression of pain that was almost habitual; and her forehead was already beginning to show marks of the perpetual care and anxiety that burdened her heart.

After sauntering round the garden for awhile, they went into the little parlour. Bertie—an overgrown girl of sixteen, with a crop of red curls and mischievous gray eyes with green lights in them—sat listening to the conversation that was being carried on by Chrissie and Theo most demurely for about ten minutes; then she rose, and turned as if to leave the room.

‘Where are you going, Bertie?’ Miss Muir asked.

‘I am going to the office to see Mr. Esthwaite. Now don't say “No,” there's a dear old thing! He

knows we are here ; I saw him watching us from the window as we came along by the side of the dock.'

'Did you, dear?' said Chrissie, a slight flush spreading over her pale face. 'But I would rather you did not go to the office this morning. We must be going now : we have a good many little errands to do in the town, you know.'

'But I want to go, Chrissie ; papa never minds my going to the office. And, indeed, I *shall* go!' said the impetuous young lady, dashing out of the room and whistling 'The Girl I left behind me' as she crossed the Dockyard.

The slight flush that had appeared on Chrissie Muir's face deepened into crimson, and an expression of acute pain passed across her eyes and forehead : then suddenly the bright colour faded out, leaving her paler than she had been before. Bertie's impertinent defiance was nothing new, but it was humiliating 'to have to endure it before a stranger ; and Chrissie was not so strong as she had been ; trifling worries that she would have laughed at and forgotten at one time were remembered and pondered over now, till not unfrequently they became causes of real pain. Intuitively Theo understood much of what was passing in her visitor's mind, and with a quick impulsive movement she put out her hand and took Chrissie's in hers, and held it for some moments, caressing it with

a soft, pitying touch that made Chrissie's heart swell with feelings that were new to her. No word of sympathy was spoken, no mention made of friendship, or of future intercourse; but each of these women felt that she had found what she had hitherto much needed—an understanding friend.

Much sooner than Chrissie had expected, Bertie came back, looking exceedingly cross and annoyed. 'What a horror that Mr. Esthwaite is!' she said, throwing herself into Captain Davidson's arm-chair.

A very few minutes later the 'horror' tapped gently at the parlour door and asked if he might come in.

'I am afraid I was cross to you just now, Bertie,' he said, after bowing formally to Chrissie and Theo; 'but I was very busy at that moment, and you caused me to make rather a troublesome mistake.'

'Did I? I'm so glad,' said Bertie gleefully. 'As to being busy, I don't call copying something out of one book into another busyness.'

'Do you not? but I do; especially when that "something" happens to be of a complicated nature.'

'Don't use long words, and don't speak such good grammar; I hate people who talk like that.'

Hitherto, knowing that an attempt to restrain Bertie's tongue would be a venturesome process, Chrissie had endeavoured successfully to restrain her

own, but Bertie's last speech was uttered so rapidly and passionately that Chrissie began to be apprehensive of what might follow.

'Do be good, Bertie,' she said, with a beseeching glance.

'No, Miss Muir, I shan't be good; and I shan't be silent either, if that's what you mean.'

Ralph Esthwaite smiled—evidently a smile of amusement it was, yet it was not quite free from irony. Bertie saw only the latter.

'Oh, you may smile as sarcastically as ever you choose,' she said, with a disagreeable little laugh; 'it doesn't interfere with my happiness, neither does it improve your appearance. Certainly I shall never wonder again why Chrissie wouldn't marry you. Oh, what a life she would have had, to be sure!'

'Bertie, we will go, if you please,' said Chrissie, rising, her face flushed, her eyelids heavy with the burning tears that would hardly be kept back any longer.

Ralph Esthwaite turned to open the door. Bertie left the room first; as Chrissie passed out she raised her eyes to Ralph's with such a timid, deprecating look that he took her hand in his, and held it almost unconsciously. Their eyes met—met as they had not done for years—and unspoken revelations were made that caused a sudden trembling of heart on

both sides. It was all there—all the old clinging love, the love of youth, the love of years. Ralph Esthwaite had persuaded himself long ago that his was dead, or dying, and Christine Muir had striven with all her might to crush the life out of hers; but at this moment Ralph felt—not for the first time—that he had been mistaken, and Chrissie knew more certainly than ever that she had been unsuccessful. For a few minutes, as Ralph held Chrissie's hand with a warm, tight grasp in both his own, a thrill of intensest joy—of deep, conscious happiness—passed over both; then, suddenly and simultaneously, the remembrance of the knot that was in the thread of their fate darkened the joy. Chrissie withdrew her hand, and turned slowly away; Ralph Esthwaite stood aside to allow her to pass.

‘Don't distress yourself about anything Bertie has said, Miss Muir. She's a wilful little puss; but, to use a truism, she will grow wiser as she grows older.’

‘Thank you. I am afraid the truth of your truism is rather doubtful in some cases; but I must hope for the best as far as Bertie is concerned.’

Ralph Esthwaite remained standing in the little parlour for some minutes after Miss Muir had gone. Theo busied herself ostensibly with her window-plants, but in reality with conjectures concerning

her visitors. She pitied them—pitied them both most earnestly; and she acknowledged to herself that Ralph Esthwaite had risen much in her good opinion during the interview that had just passed.

Theo was so much absorbed in her work and her thoughts that she did not wonder at Mr. Esthwaite's long silence; she was almost startled when he exclaimed: 'I beg your pardon, Miss Davidson; I had quite forgotten—I am very rude.'

'You had forgotten my presence?' Theo inquired, with a smile.

'To be honest, I had. I am very sorry.'

'Please don't apologize.'

'But apology is due. I am almost sorry I came in at all. I didn't want Bertie to go away in an angry mood, and, unintentionally, I fear I have made matters worse.'

'Oh, it was nothing; and I am sure you were very good.'

Esthwaite smiled, and then he began to ask himself why he was staying there instead of going back to his work. Surely he was not weak enough to be longing for sympathy! The very thought, or rather the dread of such a feeling, awakened his self-contempt, and with a curt 'Good-morning!' he hurried away to the office. But before the day was over he found himself in the parlour of the Dock-

yard Cottage again, and the same thing happened on many subsequent days. 'The Captain's niece was a nice, warm-hearted girl,' Ralph Esthwaite told himself; 'there was no nonsense about her, and her society was a pleasant change from that of his cross old housekeeper.'

As the days went on the friendship between Chrissie Muir and Theo Davidson grew to be a thing of much strength and beauty. Very soon each knew all that was to be told of the other's little life-story, and there was a hopeless dreariness hanging over the future fate of both that was very productive of sympathy.

But there was a wide difference between the ways in which these two women viewed what had befallen them. To Theo the sorrow that was in her heart was little more than a too-sombre background to an otherwise pleasant picture. It was real sorrow, and at times it struck both deep and chill, but for the most part she had enough of quiet strength to lay it aside. She could not spend a lonely, twilight hour in thinking of Christopher Harvey—of his goodness, his tenderness, his love—the thoughtful, protecting love that might have been hers, and would have made every day of her life sweet and bright with happiness—she could not spend an hour thus without much and keen after-suffering; therefore

when the temptation came—when her heart yearned to be soothed with dreams of things that might have been realities—she put forth her strength, laid stern commands upon herself, and sent her thoughts out on other errands.

It was not in Chrissie Muir's power to follow either the advice or the example of her friend in these things. 'She was a weak, quiet little creature,' people said, 'and as colourless in character as in appearance'; but in this people were mistaken. None of those who constituted the little world about her, and who gossiped over her sad story during morning calls and tea-parties, guessed anything of the real strength of mind, or depth of heart, or capacity for suffering, that lay behind the sad eyes, and underneath the staid manners of Chrissie Muir. What knew they of the dull heartache, the hopelessness, the passionate longing for the old love and happiness, that hung like a heavy mist over the fairest and brightest things of God's beautiful world? Who had whispered to them of tossings on a sleepless pillow, of whole nights spent in agonizing prayers and tears, and of dark, dark hours wherein it seemed as if God Himself had forsaken her? . . .

'Needs must it have been
A sore heart-wasting.'

But of these things no one knew—if anyone conjectured them in secret, it was Ralph Esthwaite.

Since the day when the Miss Muirs had made their first visit to the Dockyard Cottage, Ralph and Chrissie had met much more frequently than they had been in the habit of doing before. Chrissie rarely passed the Dockyard without calling to see Theo; and it was easy for Ralph Esthwaite to persuade himself that he had urgent need of Captain Davidson, and did not know where he was to be found, or to meet Chrissie ‘accidentally’ as she came out of the cottage. Sometimes he despised himself for these little manoeuvres, and decided not to stoop to them in future; but when the future became the present, he found that love was stronger than pride. His love for Chrissie had ever been a true and worthy love; it had long lain dormant, or nearly so; and it was re-awakening now with added strength. Love, if there is any life in it at all, is a great exaggerator of hope; and Ralph Esthwaite, seeing in Chrissie’s changing colour, and tell-tale eyes, and sweet little smiles of welcome, some foundation for renewed hopefulness, began to build a towering edifice upon it. Chrissie was giving way, he said to himself, and he would make one more—one last effort to induce her to become his wife at once. If he failed, he would never waste so much as one loving thought upon her again: if he was

successful, he would thank Heaven for his success day and night to the end of his life.

It is an October evening ; bright, clear, and cold. It is nearly eight o'clock, but, judging from the light in the window of the Dockyard office, Ralph Esthwaite is still at work. Perhaps we had better not trust to appearances only, but, treading lightly over the crackling chips outside, take a peep through one of the lower panes.

A little to our surprise, we perceive that the junior partner is not at work. His somewhat boyish-looking head is bent down under the central gaslight ; his dark hair and fierce moustache have been attended to even more carefully than usual ; his stern features are relaxed into a pleasant smile ; and his handsome dark eyes are sparkling with most unwonted light. He is reading a packet of old letters. I, who know, am able to tell you that they are the letters that were written by Christine Muir before the engagement was broken off. Such fervent, simple, loving letters they are.

Having noted these things, we will leave the Dockyard ; turn up the lane outside ; pass rapidly along under the bare rustling trees that take such weird shadows in the moonlight, and away up by the riverside to Oak Hill.

In the drawing-room there we shall find Mr. Peter Muir asleep on a sofa ; Mr. Johnson Muir nodding in his chair ; Bertie seated comfortably on the carpet playing with a huge black retriever ; and Chrissie in a low chair near the fire pretending to read.

Chrissie Muir is looking her best to-night. She is wearing a dress of pale-blue silk ; her auburn hair has been brushed into curls that stray lightly over her neck. There is a little flush on her cheek, a little gleam in her eye, and something that is almost a smile on her lips. She was down at the Dockyard this morning ; and Ralph was so kind—oh, so kind ! What if he should some day tell her that he had decided to wait yet a few years longer, and during these few years to be to her all that he had ever been before—a help, a comfort, a joy—a joy that lightened all her cares and sorrows ! It might be ! How light her heart was ! and what a strange, sweet tremor there was in it !—a tremor that became palpitation when the hall-door bell sounded through the house.

A note for Miss Muir the servant brought in : he waited for an answer. ‘ Show Mr. Esthwaite into the dining-room,’ Chrissie said when she had read the note. It had been written by Ralph Esthwaite, and contained an urgent request that Miss Muir would give him an opportunity of speaking to her alone.

Chrissie stood for a few moments trying to calm herself, to still the quick pulsation of her heart. She might have stood much longer, but she remembered that her father would probably awake soon, and that she would then be required for the never-omitted game of whist. With an involuntary glance at the mirror she left the room; stood a few seconds in the hall; and then with burning cheeks and sparkling eyes she went into the dining-room. Ralph Esthwaite pressed her hand warmly, and drew her to a chair near the fire.

Ralph had not done as some men would have done under similar circumstances—he had not prepared a long and carefully-worded speech full of

‘Those common and complimentary phrases
Most men think so fine in dealing and speaking with women,
But which women reject as insipid, if not as insulting.’

He knew himself too well, and his feelings were too deep and intense for this; he would trust to them to provide him with all needful words.

But the needful words did not come very readily at first. The soft eyes that looked so innocently into his had in them such pathetic wistfulness—such depths of confidence and love—that they disturbed the current of his thoughts for a time. Surely, surely he had been to blame when he had persuaded himself to cast away such precious love as that!

But this was no time to dwell upon the past; the present was with him—the present that was to decide his whole future. The remembrance of this stirred his heart passionately, and the tide of feeling that swept over him like an electric thrill came surging to his lips.

‘Miss Muir—Chrissie, I have come once more to ask you the question that I said in my blindness of heart I would never ask you again. I have been miserable, wretched—if you have the slightest particle of feeling or compassion, don’t condemn me to go on living the life I have lived during the last few years. Chrissie—Chrissie, my darling, be my wife. You have not been happy any more than I have: for your own sake let me put an end to all that you have to trouble you. . . . Chrissie dearest, you cannot hold out any longer—it is impossible.’

As Ralph Esthwaite spoke, he rose from his chair and stood leaning against the mantel-shelf, close to where Chrissie was sitting. He held her hand in his, and as he concluded he stooped and covered it with kisses. Chrissie trembled and shivered, and was silent.

‘You do not speak, my little one,’ he went on; ‘I have been too abrupt and impetuous. Ah! you shall tame all that down when you are my wife.’

‘Oh, Ralph, Ralph!’ was all that Christine Muir

could say through her tears. Her voice was choked with sobs ; she felt weak, powerless. How was she to resist his confident, passionate pleading—how could she do this when he was standing there, holding her hand in his, caressing it with gentle touches that thrilled through every nerve, and looking her through and through with his dark, love-softened eyes ? ‘ Was resistance possible ? ’ she asked herself. She was wavering. Ralph Esthwaite saw that she was ; his heart gave a sudden leap of joy—joy gave assurance ; and he drew her to his side, and kissed her with passionate kisses.

For a few minutes Chrissie was passive—strangely passive—then she tried to concentrate her strength, to shake off the peculiar, over-mastering fascination that was in Ralph Esthwaite’s presence, and to force upon herself the remembrance of the past. The memory of that last hour by her mother’s side brought a consciousness that stung her to the quick ; with a low cry of pain she turned away, and buried her face in her hands.

‘ Oh, I am weak—weak ! ’ she said—‘ weak and wicked, and faithless ! . . . Oh, Ralph, Ralph ! I love you as I have always done—nay, more ; but I cannot—I dare not—break the promise I made. Have pity upon me—have pity ; don’t tempt me any more ! ’

‘Chrissie darling, I will *not* have pity—not the pity you ask for—it would be false and cruel. You acknowledge that you love me still; I knew it—I knew it; you are mine—mine for ever; and nothing shall ever part us again.’

Chrissie’s strength was returning, and calmness with it.

‘Ralph,’ she said gently, ‘forgive me for my seeming weakness just now—forgive and forget; and let me ask you a question. If I were to break a solemn vow made to a dead mother, how much faith could you, a living husband, have in me?’

‘As strong faith as ever man placed in woman since the world began. It is no use, Chrissie; it is in your power to blight every hope I have, to darken my whole life—do it if you will; you shall never convince me that you are doing right.’

And Ralph Esthwaite drew himself up to his full height as he spoke; and over his face and into his eyes there crept a proud, impassive look; and a cold smile was upon his lips. There was silence—painful silence for some minutes.

Then the expression of his face relaxed again; and when he spoke his voice was tender as it had been at first. ‘Chrissie, my own darling,’ he said, ‘think once more; and by all that you hold sacred answer me as your own heart tells you that you ought to do.

Don't recall the past—let it go ; think only of what is before you—before us both.'

'I have thought of it—dwelt upon it till I have been thought-sick ; but it has never changed my mind.'

'And your final answer to the request I have made to-night is a negative one ?'

'It is.'

Ralph Esthwaite turned away, and stood for some minutes with his hand on the table, staring vacantly at the shade of the lamp. Chrissie watched him sadly. His face was pale as hers, and she could see by the quivering of his lips that a great struggle was going on within. Her whole heart, a heart full of passionate love, was his ; it was strained to its fullest tension by seeing him suffer thus ; and by the consciousness that she was the cause of it all. It was more than she could endure quite passively ; she went up to him and laid one hand gently upon his shoulder. 'Ralph,' she said, 'forgive me ; and think kindly of me—as you have done. You have been so good lately—so good and kind that I have been almost happy. You will be the same still, won't you ?'

No answer—only a darkening of the eyes, a slight twitching at the angles of the mouth.

'You will not go away angry, will you ?' said Chrissie yet more tenderly and sweetly, and touching his pale, rigid face with her soft fingers.

Still no answer came.

Then, stirred by the blinding, impellent power of her great love, and half unknowing what she did, she drew his face down to hers and kissed it—kissed it softly twice. ‘Ralph, Ralph, speak to me!—say something!’ she cried in an agony of love and shame.

Ralph Esthwaite held out his hand: ‘Perhaps I had better say “good-evening,” Miss Muir.’

That was all. A minute later he was gone, and Christine was alone—alone with her love and her sorrow and her dead hope.

CHAPTER V.

JUXTAPOSITION.

‘Juxtaposition, in fine; and what is juxtaposition?’

Look you, we travel along in the railway-carriage or steamer,
And, *pour passer le temps*, till the tedious journey be ended,
Lay aside paper or book, to talk with the girl that is next one;
And, *pour passer le temps*, with the terminus all but in prospect,
Talk of eternal ties and marriages made in heaven.’

A. H. CLOUGH: *Amours de Voyage*.

ALMOST as a matter of course Chrissie told Theo Davidson that Ralph Esthwaite had renewed his offer of marriage; she told her as a simple duty. ‘It would not be right to have secrets from her friend,’ she said to herself; but her manner of performing

this duty was so strangely indifferent, her words so cold and passionless, that Theo was perplexed. 'I have been mistaken in thinking that Chrissie's love was so strong,' Theo said to herself as she walked back to the Dockyard.

And after that day Theo ceased to wonder why she saw so much less of Christine Muir, and why Ralph Esthwaite came so much more frequently to the Dockyard Cottage than he had done before. Sometimes Theo felt that she pitied him almost more than she pitied Chrissie. His was such a solitary life: he seemed to have fewer friends, fewer pleasures, fewer resources, than any man she had ever known. Certainly he was to be pitied. If Theo's compassion was a somewhat unsettled feeling, it was Ralph Esthwaite's fault, not hers. It was owing to his variable moods, to the fact that he was rarely two days, often not two hours, in the same state of mind or temper. He was more changeable now than he had ever been. To-day he would be

'Cold, stern, impassive, like an angled wall—
Squared to his duties';

to-morrow he would be sad and gentle and courteous, exercising without effort a peculiar fascination that very few people could resist. Theo never tried to resist it: she was as unsuspecting of her own feelings as of other people's in such matters as these.

And now it was the beginning of November. Theo Davidson was looking forward to the Christmas that she was to spend at Woodgreve Hall; and Chrissie Muir had left home for a few days—she had gone to pay her annual visit to an aunt who lived in the West Riding.

It was the third day of Chrissie's absence. Theo was beginning to miss her, and to feel the want of the daily walk to Oak Hill that she had been in the habit of taking lately. 'I think I will go and see Bertie to-morrow,' Theo said to herself as she sauntered up and down the Dockyard in the moonlight. Mr. Broxon and her uncle were smoking in the little parlour, and Theo had stolen out for a breath of pure air.

How delightful it was! The river glittering in the moonlight, the haze over the gabled roofs of the distant town; the tall dark masts of the ships in the harbour rising against the silver-crested clouds, the pure cool breeze, the sense of freedom! Theo thought of the silly little lamb in Mavor's spelling-book, that got out of the fold and frisked and danced about in the moonlight, and came at last to an untimely end in the den of a cruel wolf. It was comforting to know that there were no wolves in the Dockyard.

Passing the edge of the dock where the idle *Juno*

was still lying, Theo saw that the men had forgotten to remove the plank that led to the deck. Obeying a momentary impulse, she tripped lightly across it, growing uncomfortably dizzy as she remembered the deep dark gap that yawned below, and feeling considerable relief when she found herself fairly on board. 'It was a silly thing to do,' she said half aloud, and wondering how she was to get back again. Then she laughed at her ridiculous fears, and began pacing up and down the lonely deck, wondering whether her mother liked the last new dress that Uncle Sam had sent her, and what Ada was doing, and how much baby had grown, and whether Mr. Harvey remembered her as frequently as she remembered him.

Then the little door in the black paling creaked on its hinges, and a tall straight figure came striding down the yard. It was Mr. Esthwaite. He was going to the cottage, and he would have to pass close by the edge of the dock. Theo was a little annoyed at the idea of being found in such an odd predicament, and yet she was glad at the prospect of safe release.

'Perhaps you didn't know that the *Juno* was a haunted ship!' she exclaimed as Ralph passed close to the plank.

'Miss Davidson! What *are* you doing there?

Surely you are not alone?' he said, skipping on to the deck.

'Yes; quite alone. I came here almost without thinking of what I was doing; and then I found myself too much of a coward to venture back again. Will you pilot me safely over the plank, please?'

'I don't know. I almost think I ought to leave you here a little longer as a penance for being so imprudent.'

'It wouldn't be a very grievous penance; I was quite enjoying myself.'

'And I have interrupted your enjoyment? I am sorry for that. What did it consist in?'

'Oh! in nothing specially—the beautiful night, and the stillness, and walking up and down, and thinking.'

Then they stood in silence a little while, Theo feeling ill at ease and slightly provoked with herself, and Ralph Esthwaite trying to weigh calmly a strong and sudden impulse that had possessed him. Sudden, I have called it, and it was so, but, like most sudden impulses, it was the result of a long and unconsciously-laid train of preparatory thought. Since what he chose to term his final rejection by Chrissie Muir, he had thought a good deal of Theo Davidson; and the more he had thought of her, the more frequently he had told himself that he might do many worse things

than ask her to be his wife. She was a sensible, kind-hearted, womanly woman, he had perceived, and she gave him a sensation of rest and quiet. She had just sufficient shrewdness and tact to enable her to find out what pleased people, and she was totally free from that morbid acuteness and over-sensitiveness of feeling that make many a man's life one long endurance of worry and disquietude. He did not deceive himself; he was not in love with her, and he would not blind himself by trying to believe that he was. All the love that he had ever had in his heart—and it had not been a little—he had thrown away, wasted it upon one who was not capable of appreciating it. But if he did at some future time ask Theo Davidson to be his wife, he would be a good and kind husband to her; she should never find out that there was a secret chamber in his heart into which she might not enter.

And standing there on the moonlit deck, with Theo near him, he turned all these things rapidly over in his mind, and asked himself where was the use of waiting any longer? He was not a boy—a week or two ago he had entered upon his thirty-seventh year—surely he might be supposed to know his own mind! Yes; he would decide his fate at once—that was, as far as it was in his power to decide it.

And, having made up his mind to do this, Ralph

Esthwaite unconsciously threw aside the frigid, impassive mood that he had worn all day, and subsided into the soft, grave, half-sad manner that suited him better than anything else. This was his natural mood: when he was a younger and a happier man he had known no other; and it never failed to come back upon him in his best hours.

'Miss Davidson,' he said in his lowest and most musical voice, 'will you take a few turns along the deck with me? I have something to ask you.'

Theo's heart began to beat 'fast enough for two.' The tones were different, but the words were strikingly similar to some she had heard not so *very* long ago. Oh! what should she do—what could she say if Mr. Esthwaite asked her the same question that Mr. Harvey had done? But she *wouldn't* be asked; she would go into the house at once.

'Oh no! I would rather not stay here any longer. Please help me across,' she said, putting out her hand. Ralph Esthwaite took her hand, but he did not seem in the least disposed to move.

'Will you not stay a very few minutes—I will not detain you longer? You ought not to refuse a true friend such a small request as this.'

The word 'friend' was reassuring; and, fancying that he might wish to know something concerning Chrissie, Theo consented at once. Ralph Esthwaite

misunderstood her ready consent. He turned a little so that the moonlight shone full on his handsome face—full into his dark eyes, bringing out with even more than usual force the strange, mesmeric power that was in them. Theo felt as if something struck into her very soul as he stood for a moment thus, and then, drawing her a little nearer to him, said: ‘Miss Davidson—Theo, I may call you, may I not?—I want to ask you if you will be my wife—if you will turn a sad and solitary life into a bright and happy one, and, perhaps, put it into my power to add something of happiness to yours? . . . Look at me, dear. Tell me that I have not been mistaken in hoping that you could learn to love me?’

Theo was silent, and she trembled visibly. She felt as if she were under the influence of some strange spell—as if she dared not move or speak or even think freely under the glance of those deep, searching eyes. She longed to escape—she struggled to do so, but Ralph Esthwaite prevented this.

‘I cannot let you go—you must answer me,’ he said, with all the passion born of previous suffering coming into his voice.

‘I do not know what to say,’ Theo replied with much agitation. But for the remembrance of her former mistake, she would have made a widely different answer.

‘Would you rather be silent, then, and let me take advantage of the old proverb?’

‘Oh, no, no! You forget—we are both forgetting Chrissie. She loves you—I am quite sure she does, and I have been almost equally sure that you loved her.’

For a moment Ralph Esthwaite did not reply; he had something to contend against within that was stronger than he was aware of. When he spoke his voice was calmer than it had been before.

‘Yes; I have loved her,’ he said, ‘and I have believed that she returned my love; but men often deceive themselves in these things—I have done so.’

Strange and perplexing thoughts were tossing and whirling in the brain of Theo Davidson. She remembered the day when Chrissie had told her of Ralph Esthwaite’s renewed offer, she recalled the cold tones, the indifferent manner in which her friend had spoken, and for a moment she tried to persuade herself that the opinion she had formed of Chrissie’s love on that day had been a just one, but in this she did not quite succeed. She felt intuitively that Chrissie Muir was one of those people to whom love comes but once in their lives, and after the sweet, bright time of its coming, runs on through all the future years—sometimes a golden thread, sometimes a chain of iron—but whether of gold or of iron not to

be broken by the changes and chances of time. How could Theo, believing this, and also knowing that deep down in her own heart there was a hidden but unforgotten love—how could she dare to accept what was offered to her now? And yet how was she to refuse it with the strong influence of Ralph Esthwaite's presence upon her? What was the strange feeling—the half-dread, the half-fascination that she felt? She could not answer these questions—she would not try to answer them then.

'Will you give me time to think of what you have said?' she asked, almost timidly.

'How much time?' he inquired, with a pleased smile. 'Yes; you are wise, little woman; you shall have till to-morrow night to think of it, and then you will meet me here and make me happy, won't you?'

'Not here; no, not here; you must come to the cottage. If my uncle should be in, you must tell him that you want to speak to me.'

Again Ralph Esthwaite felt something akin to satisfaction. He interpreted favourably the intimation that his wish was not to be kept a secret from Captain Davidson.

His wish! How far was it really the wish of his heart? This was a question he hardly dared ask himself just then; but after he had seen Theo safely to the door of the cottage, and said a tender 'good-

night' to her, he went hurrying up through the town, and away across the low, flat shore down to the edge of the sea, to where the tiny wavelets rippled in and broke on the sand. Almost as rapidly the tide of impulsion receded from the heart of Ralph Esthwaite. The heart, did I say? Nay; surely I meant the brain.

Pacing up and down over the silvery beach, he felt a strange and uncomfortable sensation of weight steal over him; there was a coldness at his heart, and voices of warning and regret and reproach spoke within. That Theo Davidson was good and bright, and possessed of all the virtues of which he had made a mental inventory as he stood on the deck of the ship, he had no doubt at all; but for all that Theo was not Chrissie. Sweet, vivid memories of the days when the love that was between him and Chrissie Muir had been the one great joy of both their lives came thronging round his heart; visions of her gentle, loving ways; renewed consciousness of her ever-ready sympathy, and clearer insight into the beauty and purity of her simple nature, came over him rapidly, and woke a questioning spirit that refused to be silenced. What had he done? Had he really put away from himself for ever all chance of the life-long happiness of which he had dreamed—half-unconsciously—even during the years when

they had been almost as strangers to each other? Had he really done that which would make it a sin on his part ever to indulge in such dreams again? . . . He had, and he would abide by what he had done. He would forget the higher happiness—he would force his heart to content itself with the lower.

And how was it with Theo? Poor Theo! she, too, was grievously perplexed with doubts and difficulties. Not for one minute, either that evening or during the following day, could she attain to anything like peace of mind or power of decision. Of one thing she was quite certain—her love for Christopher Harvey; how, then, could she possibly have the same feeling for Ralph Esthwaite? It was not possible—of course it was not. And yet what could be the secret of the strange haunting spell that he had thrown over her? If it was not love, what was it? and, whatever it was, where was she to find strength enough to shake it off, and nerve herself to pain him by refusal? And, if she did refuse him, how was she to know that she should not be just as sorry for it afterwards as she had been after her rejection of Mr. Harvey? and, if she accepted him, feeling only half assured either of her own feelings or of his, where would be the guarantee of their future happiness? And how was she to reconcile such an acceptance with her views of the bond of

friendship that was between herself and Chrissie Muir?

Not one of these questions could Theo Davidson answer for herself decisively; and this strange incapacity I cannot defend. That there are people in the world who are changeful, people who do not know their own minds, and also people who are capable of feeling more than one very tender attachment at the same time, no one will doubt. I do not say they are the highest natures who can do these things.

Half-past seven p.m. Mr. Ralph Esthwaite was pacing the floor of his office; he had decided to wait till the clock struck eight before going across to the cottage. Captain Davidson occasionally went up to Mr. Broxon's to supper, and he rarely went before eight o'clock.

Suddenly Esthwaite's meditations were disturbed: there was a low knock at the office-door. 'Come in,' he said, in the peculiar official tone which he kept purposely for these two words. Little Becky made her appearance, laid a note on the desk, and went out again with a half-terrified look that amused Ralph immensely.

It was an odd little note, having neither beginning nor ending in the ordinary sense of the term, and it contained only a brief request that Mr. Esthwaite

would allow the writer one more day for consideration. Ralph Esthwaite refolded it carefully, and locked it in his desk with a sigh that was unmistakably one of relief.

One more day! Theo felt a sense of freedom too; but the morning and part of the afternoon passed on, and she was still as far as ever from feeling anything like a settled conviction as to what she ought to do. More than once she had sought relief in a few quiet tears, but they did not in any way tend to her better self-knowledge. She would write another note, she said to herself at last, and this time she would ask for a week or ten days. Chrissie Muir would be back by that time, and she would tell Chrissie everything. It was no use writing to her; letters were always so unsatisfactory. And, having written this second note, Theo sent Becky across to the office once more; but Becky returned with the note in her hand. Mr. Esthwaite was out, she said.

A few hours later Theo received a note which had been hurriedly written by Ralph Esthwaite at the High Street office. It ran thus:

‘DEAR MISS DAVIDSON,

‘Will you excuse me from coming down to the Dockyard Cottage this evening to learn your answer? I will come to-morrow evening if you will see me,

and will explain the causes which have compelled me to make this request.

‘Yours very truly,

‘RALPH ESTHWAITE.’

Excuse him? Yes, most readily! But Theo wished that she had sent her own note sooner. She might send it still, if she thought proper; but perhaps it would be better to wait; she could send it on the following evening in time to prevent his coming. And then Theo began to wonder what was the nature of the causes which had prevented Mr. Esthwaite from keeping his engagement. It must be something urgent, she knew; and while she was still wondering, Uncle Sim came in, and Uncle Sim was the bearer of sad news. Mr. Peter Muir was ill again. He had had another epileptic attack—an attack so bad that his brother had telegraphed for Miss Chrissie. This, then, explained Ralph Esthwaite’s detention; but what had prevented him from putting the facts into words? . . . Had the question been put to him, he would have been at a loss for an answer. In those hours he did not dare to acknowledge even to himself the true state of his feelings.

On the morning of the following day, leaving her note to be taken up to the High Street by Becky, Theo went up to Oak Hill. Chrissie had returned on

the previous evening; and Theo, finding that she could be both a help and a comfort to her friend, remained with her for several days. Chrissie's gratitude was great; to her gentle, clinging nature Theo's stronger tone and more vigorous energy presented something to lean upon in those dark hours. Very dark they were, for Mr. Peter was lying in a state that might have been termed hopeless. It was only a question of time, Dr. Jermyn said.

But the time was prolonged beyond the good doctor's expectations, and Uncle Sim grew tired of being alone, so Theo went back to the Dockyard Cottage. During her stay at Oak Hill she had had no suitable opportunity of saying anything to Chrissie concerning Ralph Esthwaite. Her indecision was almost as troublesome as ever during the first few days after her return, and twice she went up to Oak Hill for the purpose of seeking Chrissie's advice; but Chrissie's sorrow was so deep and real that Theo's courage failed when she tried to introduce her own perplexity.

But as the days went on the momentous question began to settle itself to a great extent. Freed from the influence of Ralph Esthwaite's presence, Theo no longer felt that the utterance of the unkindly 'No' was beyond her power. Then she grew impatient, and wished he would come; she longed to put her

half-formed resolution to the test. Her wish was soon granted. Ralph Esthwaite made his appearance one evening when Captain Davidson was intending to go up to Mr. Broxon's to supper. The Captain would have remained at home, but a very slight hint from Ralph induced him to keep to his original intention.

Theo watched Ralph Esthwaite attentively during the few minutes that he sat talking before her uncle went out. He was paler and, she could almost have fancied, thinner than he had been. There was certainly a drawn look about the lower part of his face, his mouth was compressed, and there was deep resolve written on every feature; only his eyes retained anything of softness or sadness. Theo began to fear.

Then Uncle Sim went out, and an awkward silence followed. Ralph was the first to break it.

'Miss Davidson,' he said, 'I have come to throw myself on your mercy, and how I can dare to do it I don't know.'

Theo dropped her work and looked up at him with a half-startled, half-inquiring look. Then all at once she felt certain of what was coming.

'Speak plainly,' she said, 'and don't let anything you may have to say to me cost you any pain; it will not cost me any.'

'You are not speaking in anger?' he said, looking doubtfully at her crimson cheeks and flashing eyes.

'In anger! No. . . . Do you understand me so little as that?' she said with a smile. 'I understand you much better.'

'Do you? I wonder if you will understand me when I have told you what I wish to tell you? . . . I had better come to the point at once. I will make no excuses for myself, but I will ask you beforehand to judge me leniently. You knew of my old engagement to Miss Muir, why it was broken off, and that she refused to renew it, except conditionally. You knew of these things, but of my blindness, my impatience, my unreasonableness, you can have known nothing. If you had, you would have treated the offer I made to you the other evening with the contempt it deserved. Do not mistake me; I was sincere when I made it; I believed that it was in my power to make you happy; and my regard for you is such that I would gladly have trusted my life's happiness in your hands; but I ought to have known better than to speak to you as I did, for I was conscious that I could never give to another such love as I have given to Christine Muir. And I confess with sorrow and with shame that even before there was a possibility of her being free I half regretted what I had done; the

nearness of this possibility has deepened my regret ; and I cannot—I dare not——’

‘ And you shall not,’ interrupted Theo, holding out her hand to him, and smiling through eyes that were brimming over with tears of relief. ‘ Oh, I am so glad ! I cannot, cannot tell you how glad I am— for Chrissie’s sake, and for yours, and for my own. I don’t know for whose sake I feel most glad ; for my own, I think.’

A look of perplexity came over Ralph Esthwaite’s face. Theo understood it, and, by way of comfort and enlightenment, she told him something of what had been going on in her own heart since the evening when they stood on the deck of the *Juno*. He was relieved, but nothing that Theo could say by way of restoring his self-esteem appeared to have any effect. He was thoroughly humiliated, and seemed as if he could hardly make his self-accusations severe enough. ‘ Slight me as you may,’ he concluded,

“ You cannot cast me in mine own esteem
More low than where I lie ; I scorn myself
With such a bitterness as bars all taste
Of other’s scorn.”

Then Ralph Esthwaite went away, and Theo sat thinking alone until her uncle came in. Her thoughts were a strange mixture : but they began and ended with the same idea. ‘ Surely no one ever had such a

happy escape before,' she said to herself again and again.

After that evening the dark, wintry days passed slowly and uneventfully; and Theo began to think longingly of 'mother and home.' Truth to tell, she was beginning to feel just a little tired of the Dock-yard; and there was a certain soreness and weariness at her heart that at times craved piteously for sympathy. Chrissie Muir saw, and partly understood this need; but to satisfy it fully was beyond Chrissie's power.

During these days no change of any moment took place in the state of Mr. Peter Muir: it was possible, Dr. Jermyn said, that he might yet linger for many months. This opinion of the doctor's was repeated by Mr. Johnson Muir to Ralph Esthwaite; and for a little time Ralph was perplexed. Should he wait—wait until Chrissie was quite free, or should he go to her at once, and confess what he had done, and tell her of his sorrow and repentance, and ask to be forgiven? It was not easy to decide; and when his decision was made it was not easy to act upon it. The after-knowledge that he had infused into the gathered gloom of Chrissie Muir's life enough of the sunshine of happiness to gild the edge of every cloud, was more than sufficient compensation for the difficulties he had overcome; and the consciousness that

such compensation was far beyond his deserts was a useful lesson to him—a lesson which he does not appear to have forgotten yet. . . . Ralph Esthwaite is a happy man now; and his wife is a happy little woman—and her happiness has so altered her appearance that no one will recognise her from the description given on a former page of this little history.

* * * * *

Some time about noon on the bright, frosty Saturday preceding Christmas Day, the Rev. Christopher Harvey might have been seen walking along the road between Swynnerstone and Woodgreve. There was an air of even more than usual thoughtfulness about him; he held his head a little on one side; his eyes were fixed on the snow-covered ground; and now and then his lips moved slightly, as the lips of people who live much alone are very apt to do; and once or twice he uttered his thoughts quite audibly. A listener might have learnt two facts:

I. That Mr. Harvey was in love.

II. That a new living had been offered to him.

The living of High Stainborough, as Mr. Harvey explained to Mr. Davidson when he arrived at Woodgreve Hall, was worth a hundred and fifty pounds per annum more than the one he was then holding: and this sum would, under certain circumstances, be a welcome addition to a small income. But there were

other things to be taken into consideration. He had more than enough for his own moderate needs; he had been comfortably settled at Swynnerstone for many years; and the mutual good-will that existed between himself and his parishioners made him very reluctant to accept the offer that had been made to him.

'It would have been a different thing altogether,' said Mr. Harvey, 'if I had not been alone in the world.'

To this remark Mr. Davidson made no reply; and a look of perplexity came over his face that Mr. Harvey could not understand. Poor little Mr. Davidson! He was in almost as great a dilemma as that which had embarrassed his daughter some months before. He could not tell Mr. Harvey of certain suspicions that had passed through his mind lately—suspicions gathered from confidences that Ada had made to her mother concerning Theo. What was he to do? How could he further the warmest wish of his own heart, and by so doing make both his friend and his daughter happy? Much to his satisfaction, Mr. Harvey helped to remove his difficulties.

'I have wondered,' said Mr. Harvey, in a slow, musing manner; 'I have wondered frequently of late whether it would be of any use if I were to speak to Theo once more. I believe I promised that I would

not trouble her again; but something, some feeling which I cannot define, has often urged me to do so.'

'I—I think I should,' said Mr. Davidson nervously, and feeling as if he had spoken very boldly.

'Should you?' exclaimed Mr. Harvey, noting signs of encouragement in Mr. Davidson's voice and manner more than in his words. 'If I do, it must be at once—before I decide about the living. Theo is coming home on Tuesday, is she not?'

'Yes; I am going over for her on Monday afternoon, and I hope to persuade my brother to come back with me for a few days.'

It is a Christmas evening. The snow is falling in thick white flakes, drifting over the fields and hedgerows round Woodgreve Hall, lying softly on the boughs of the leafless trees, on the Quarter-deck, on the broad lawn. Night and silence brood over the world without; within, love and happiness reign.

Entering the house by the aid of a little fern-seed, and opening the door of the schoolroom, we come upon a merry scene. At the further end of the room is a huge Christmas-tree, lighted with tapers, laden with presents, and presided over by Ada and Uncle Sim. The walls are decked with holly and laurel, a mistletoe-bough hangs in the centre of the room, and there is a profuse display of paper flags and Chinese

lanterns. Mr. and Mrs. Davidson are sitting a little apart from the groups of noisy children, discussing in grateful words an offer which Uncle Sim has made concerning the future welfare of Tom and Rupert; Clara is seated at the piano, singing 'Mrs. Bond' to amuse 'the babies,' and Louie is behind a screen preparing for charades.

Two people who have stolen away from this scene of mirth are sitting by the drawing-room fire—they are Theo Davidson and Christopher Harvey. As we enter the room we hear that they are talking about Swynnerstone. Mr. Harvey is more glad than he is able to say when he finds that Theo's wishes are only echoes of his own. Theo's future home will be the pretty little Swynnerstone Parsonage, not the Rectory, High Stainborough.

'And you think you will be quite happy, dear?' Mr. Harvey says tenderly, and rather anxiously.

'How can you doubt it?' Theo replies; 'I am so happy that I am half afraid of waking and finding it all a dream.'

And we will leave them sitting there in the warm firelight, hand-in-hand, like little children. As we turn away we hear a gentle, kindly voice saying :

'Ah! dearest, joy unto the spirit is
What light is to the flowers—no colour else.
Joy is the voice of good—the voice of God.'

SQUIRE HESILDENE'S SORROW.

'As the sun,
Ere it is risen, sometimes paints its image
In the atmosphere, so often do the spirits
Of great events stride on before the events,
And in to-day already walks to-morrow.'

COLERIDGE : *From the German of Schiller.*

PROEMIAL.

SQUIRE HESILDENE, of Neston-on-the-Wolds, is my friend. He is an old man, very old; but to me his white hair and sad eyes, his feebleness and his bowed figure, speak quite as much of increasing sorrow as increasing years. Unfortunately, he lives almost alone: his little grand-daughter, 'Denise,' a tiny dark-eyed child of four summers, is all that is left to him now; and although her childish prattle does much to amuse him during the day, I feel pained when I think of the long winter evenings that he has to pass alone. The Rectory is close to the Hall, just without the park-gates, and I go across for an hour or two whenever my family will consent to what they

call a 'broken evening'; but this is not often, and my old friend is left to sit, as Sherrard the butler says, 'a-broodin' and a-ponderin' over the past, till it isn't always easy to get him back to the present.' Sherrard is a faithful servant, and he has lived at Neston Hall for many years. He can remember the Squire's wife, the Lady Margaret Hesildene, a proud beautiful woman, who died within two days of the birth of the much-desired heir; he remembers the Squire's sorrow, and his dislike of the thoughtful dark-eyed little lad whose coming into the world had caused him such bitter grief; and he knows all that has happened since. Sherrard does not profess much sympathy, but then he is a Yorkshireman born, and there is no saying how the undercurrent sets.

Within the last few years fresh sorrows have fallen upon Squire Hesildene: sorrows so keen and dark and bewildering that he does not seem able to shake off the remembrance of them even for an hour. He does not talk of them, he rarely alludes to them; but it is next to impossible to interest him in other things, or to induce him to enter into conversation of any kind. Sometimes when I go over I read to him or tell him of anything that has happened in the parish, but I hardly ever feel that I have been successful in gaining his undivided attention.

About two months ago an idea occurred to me—not

an original one; it was suggested by reading that Burton had written his 'Anatomy of Melancholy' to cure himself of that disease. A train of thought followed. My friend's sufferings were mental, his life lonely, his time unoccupied. If he could be induced to spend a few of the long evening hours in putting his sorrow into words, or at any rate writing of something connected with it, would not the exercise of the faculties of the brain tend to give relief to the overstrained heart? I believed it would; I believed that even the mere mechanical using of pen and paper would do something to blunt the keen edge of his grief.

I had much trouble in persuading my friend to comply with my wish, and his promise to make an effort of some kind for the sake of satisfying me was given with reluctance. But he kept his promise, and I had reason to be satisfied with the success of my scheme. I hope my satisfaction will be shared by the reader.

CHAPTER I.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

It is nearly nine years since Augusta Trenholm refused the hand of my son, Paul Hesildene. He bore the refusal badly; he grew moody and de-

pressed, and gave up his design of entering the Church.

I did not approve of the change in his plans. During the time that he had spent at college I had lost much money by speculation; I was no longer a wealthy man, and I had intended to present to him the living of Great Harrowby as part compensation for the heritage of which I had unintentionally defrauded him.

Paul knew of my wish. I had kept nothing from him, and it grieved me that he should thus take it out of my power to place him at once in a position of independence.

For two years more my son lived quietly at home. He was not idly disposed—I rarely remember seeing him unemployed—but, as far as I could judge, his employments were aimless and discursive. He spent much time alone in a small room at the top of the house, whence I heard occasionally the sound of some musical instrument. I also learnt that he was studying the art of painting.

It annoyed me that he should give his attention to those frivolous pursuits. And yet I knew not why it should have done, for I was aware that he was not of a frivolous nature.

Paul Hesildene, my son, I understood you better

than you knew. I saw that your soul was finely-fibred, but I knew that the fibres were strong. Your nature was high and your aspirations higher, and you lived in an atmosphere that was clearer and purer than the common air that sufficed for me. You did not live a shallow life : taking the event as it came, waiting for the next without hope or fear ; nothing was small or insignificant to you. Life was ever an earnest thing in your eyes. Even from your boyhood you were saddened by the difficulty of living up to your own high standard.

And yet, although I understood and appreciated you thus far, I failed to enlist your sympathy, to win your confidence.

I have never blamed you for this, Paul : I knew that the fault was mine.

From your youth upward I had, consciously, cherished an aversion for you. For a long time even the remembrance of your existence was a grief to me.

As you grew older I awoke to a knowledge of the injustice of my feelings. I endeavoured to shake them off ; but they were strong, and, to some extent, I endeavoured in vain.

I have said that I felt 'aversion' for you—this is not the right word ; it was 'dread'—dread of the pain you caused me. I could not meet your

eyes, or hear your voice, or note the slightest change of expression on your face without a thrill of pain. You seemed to disturb the grave where I had buried my dead.

For this reason alone was it that I, shunned you—that I felt your presence as a weight on my soul.

For my wilful error, for my blindness of heart, I pray to be forgiven. . . . Since the day that I saw you last, I have craved for the sound of your voice and the echo of your footsteps with a craving that nothing earthly can satisfy.

It was not a happy life that we lived together during those two years after my son decided not to take holy orders. We rarely met, except at breakfast and dinner: and our conversation was confined to topics on which he could not always even feign interest.

I was not surprised, or sorry, when he announced to me his wish to travel.

I inquired of him whether he had any decided object in view?

He replied that he had. He desired to become an artist: to further this desire he wished to visit Continental galleries—to study ancient masters for a year or two.

It would not have stung me more had he said that

he desired to become a linen-draper. But I did not oppose him. The prospect of being relieved from the burden of his presence was welcome.

Paul went abroad, and, to my surprise, I missed him. I could not understand my sensations at first. I did not know why the room looked cold and bare when I came down in the morning, or why I stood on the terrace listening for sounds of music, or how it was that I began to dread the hour of dinner and the long evenings. I felt humiliated when I detected myself in the indulgence of feelings like these; and I cherished the thought that they were rootless; and I persuaded myself that I was glad when they seemed to wither away.

My son visited Paris, Milan, Florence, Rome, Venice, Munich, and Dresden.

His letters to me were regular and interesting.

Two years sped away quickly; and then came a letter desiring my consent to his marriage. His intended wife was a Frenchwoman, he said, young and friendless, but of good birth; Claire Foudrinier, her name.

I wrote to tell him that I saw no reason for disapproving of his intention.

Another letter came: I had expected it. He desired something more than my consent.

By means of retrenchment, strict economy, and the unparalleled success of some investments, my circumstances had improved during my son's absence; and I was able to make arrangements with which he was perfectly satisfied. I also offered to him and to his future wife a permanent home at Neston Hall.

This offer was accepted; and a few weeks later I welcomed a son and a daughter.

I speak truly when I say that I welcomed them.

They came in the evening—rather later than they had expected, and they went upstairs at once to dress for dinner. I had hardly seen the dark-haired, bright-eyed little lady who had been presented to me by my son as his wife; but as I sat alone I felt glad to think that Paul was in the house once more, that perhaps he would never go so far away again.

Before dinner was over I had ceased to wonder that my son should have forgotten his love for Augusta Trenholm. Claire Hesildene, my daughter, was, with one exception, the most fascinating, the most loving and lovable woman I ever saw.

She was small in figure, exceedingly small. Her complexion was of a clear olive; her eyes dark and tender, her hair soft and brown, and it rippled over her head and down her shoulders in rings and curls innumerable.

She was very beautiful: but her beauty was of

slight value when compared with the perfect charm of her manner, her evident affection for Paul, and her deference to me.

She spoke good English, and rarely used a French word or phrase; when she did so, it appeared to be inadvertently, and she would apologize and correct herself if she could find an English word to suit her purpose.

Her presence in the house seemed to shed a light and a warmth which I know not how to describe; it was like a subtle aroma which stole into every part and every hour of our daily life. When happiness like this comes late, or after long seasons of coldness and darkness, it comes with a power that is almost life-giving.

When she was by, I had no need to struggle against my old feelings for Paul; they vanished as if by some charm of magic; but I found that I still seemed to shrink from being alone with him.

Paul's happiness was intense. I had never thought that he possessed such power of being happy.

In days gone by, a keen bright spirit had flashed out from behind his calm manner at intervals. I saw now that it had only needed the stimulant of sympathy to secure for these transient gleams a permanent existence.

All that was best and brightest in my son came

forth during these days of which I write. His happiness radiated from every side of his character. So pleasant, so genial he was, that men wondered at the visible change.

It was in January that my son and his wife came to Neston Hall. The Christmas festivities were over; but ours is a social neighbourhood, and invitations were numerous for some time.

Life on the Wolds of Yorkshire was new to my daughter Claire, and in her secret heart I do not think that she enjoyed it much at first. But this is only suspicion, for she was ever bright and cheerful, and her manner to her husband's friends was so happy as to win them to be her own friends at once.

It would be difficult to say whether she was most charming at home or abroad.

At home she was by turns tender and winning and womanly, impulsive, outspoken, at times perhaps slightly satirical. Then she would be all humility, and confess her little sins with the simplicity of a child.

In society she was all life and wit. People seemed to find something irresistibly fascinating in her animation, her strong and peculiar individuality, and her conversational powers.

The winter passed away. With the first warm days

of spring, our neighbours, Sir John and Lady Trenholm, returned from Rome. Their niece, Augusta, came with them; their son Guy followed a few days later.

Trenholm Park lies just on the other side of the Wold. The house is within twenty minutes' walk of Neston Hall.

For many years the friendship between Trenholm and myself had been intimate and unbroken. The refusal of my son by his niece had cast no shadow between us. It was forgotten now, not only by ourselves, but by our families. They met frequently, and were soon on cordial terms with each other.

That was a pleasant summer. Parties for riding or driving, for walking or boating, were planned almost every day. Our other neighbours—the Rector and his family, the Beechcrofts of Moor Lees, and the Selwyns of Harrowby—all contributed to our enjoyment.

Of course we saw more of the Trenholms than of other families. They were older friends, they lived nearer, and Guy seemed never so well content as when he was in the company of Paul. I did not wonder at this; but I felt considerable surprise when I saw that Augusta Trenholm was beginning to profess strong liking for the society of my daughter Claire.

I had never been able thoroughly to appreciate Augusta Trenholm.

In appearance she was what people termed a magnificent woman. Her figure was full and classically moulded, her face was handsome, but sensuous, her complexion brilliant, her features striking, and expressive of vanity and ambition, of selfishness and insincerity.

But her beauty was such, her talents so great, and her woman-of-the-world manner so perfect, that it was not easy to perceive any sign of moral defect.

I do not think Claire's insight into character was generally keen, but she seemed to feel instinctively that Augusta Trenholm's professions of friendship were not to be taken to the heart. Claire received them on the surface.

I know not whether Augusta perceived that she was not perfectly successful. Everything went on smoothly and pleasantly.

The summer passed away, autumn set in, and as usual Lady Trenholm's health began to fail. Again they went abroad. Not without regret did Sir John and Guy Trenholm leave foxes and pheasants, covers and moors, to the enjoyment of more fortunate neighbours.

It was about this time, I remember, that Mr. Brooke Cameron came down from London for a few

days' shooting. Mr. Cameron was an artist of some note, and my son's most intimate friend. He did not stay long, but he was one of those large-souled, strong-natured men who leave indelible impressions in the memory. Other visitors followed, but none whom I remember to this day with so much pleasure.

At Christmas-time, when the trees were bare, the snow on the ground, and the lake sheeted with ice, my little grand-daughter, Denise, came into the world. Never since my own coming of age had there been such unshaded rejoicing at Neston Hall.

The months that followed were months of great happiness: such peaceful fireside happiness it was that it need not be described.

Again, at the return of spring, the Trenholms came home. The old intimacy, the frequent intercourse, the pleasant sociality, were renewed as readily as before.

A change of some kind had come over Augusta Trenholm. She was, if anything, more beautiful than ever: she moved with the same stately grace, she conversed with as much brilliancy; in whatever society she might happen to be she possessed the same ruling power and won the same admiration; and yet there was an expression of discontent or disappointment visible on her face at times.

She came to Neston more frequently than before. As the summer days lengthened I began to fear that her presence was not desirable.

I know not how or when it was that I became sensible that some incongruous element had been introduced into our pleasant home atmosphere; but from the first the idea of the change was inseparably connected with Miss Trenholm.

More than once I had heard her speak patronizingly of Claire to Paul. Words of praise in tones of pity are wonderful arrows when skilfully aimed.

Very skilful in these matters was Miss Trenholm; yet in this case her arrows fell wide of the mark. Paul smiled. He only half understood Augusta Trenholm. At that time the understanding between himself and his wife was perfect.

Miss Trenholm grew less cautious. So obvious were her attempts to exercise something of her old fascinating power over my son, and so undisguised was her contempt for our motherly little Claire, that I began to fear—not for my son, but for my daughter.

But I began to hope that I had slight cause for fear. Claire seemed to understand exactly how matters stood, and her manner to Paul became sweeter than ever.

I was blind in this. The very fact that she was

making effort of any kind should have disclosed to me that she was not so sure of her power over her husband as she ought to have been.

The days passed on. They were not happy days—clouds darkened the sunshine, mist and rain followed.

So true-hearted was my son, so sure of himself, that it was not until the summer was verging into autumn that he began even to suspect the cause of his wife's unhappiness. The suspicion alone was pain to him ; its confirmation destroyed his peace of mind for many days.

After this he was more guarded. His manner to Miss Trenholm was marked by much reserve, and for some time there was a shadow—a degree of coldness between himself and his wife.

Claire began to perceive that she had been wrong, and she sought Paul's presence more frequently than she had ever done before—haunting him with wistful half-sad eyes, and anticipating his wishes in a quiet, tender way that was touching to see. It was not in him to resist the silent pleading of one who was dearer to him than his own life. Reconciliation followed. It would be difficult to say whether Claire's humility or Paul's generosity was greatest.

Again there was warmth and sunshine, love and happiness, at Neston Hall.

CHAPTER II.

A DAY OF TROUBLE.

THE ground was strewn with autumn leaves, but the days were still warm and sunny.

One morning I sat on the terrace by the library-window; Sherrard had brought *The Times*, Claire and Mrs. Mackelthwaite, the nurse, were playing with little Denise on the lawn below, Paul had ridden over to Blackwall Corner to see a pony that was being broken for his wife.

Presently Mrs. Mackelthwaite brought Denise up to be kissed. It was baby's bed-time, she said—baby always slept for two hours in the middle of the day. Claire went into the drawing-room for her work, and then came and sat by me on the terrace.

She had not been sitting long, when we saw Guy Trenholm coming up the avenue at a rapid pace. He was at all times an abrupt-mannered youth, but I saw at once that there was something more than usually rough and strange in his bearing this morning. Striding across the lawn, darting a glance of wrath or scorn, or both, towards me, he handed to Claire a note or letter.

'There, Mrs. Hesildene,' he said; 'I think it is

only right that you should have the pleasure of reading that.'

Claire took it in her hand; as she did so, she looked up at the young man's flashing eyes and heated, angry face with a look of surprise and rebuke; then she opened the note, and read it slowly. I should say she must have read it more than once.

When she had done so she folded it mechanically, and handed it to me.

Never shall I forget the expression that was on my daughter's face as she rose up from her chair and turned away from the terrace. It spoke of an agony of pain beyond all power to describe in words. Her features were white and drawn, her lips blue and quivering, her nostrils dilated, and her brown eyes distended and staring in a blank, unseeing way into the far distance. She uttered no word as she went down the path through the trees.

When she had gone I read the note. These were the words it contained:

'AUGUSTA,

'Will you meet me in the old place this evening at half-past eight? Do not refuse me this, I beg of you—I have a request to make which I wish to make personally. Have no fear that I shall allude to

the subject of last evening—no word of my unchanging love for you shall ever pass my lips again.

‘Ever yours,

‘PAUL HESILDENE.

August 23rd.

Then followed the date of the current year in figures.

‘August 23rd—that was yesterday,’ I said, refolding the note.

‘Yes, it was yesterday,’ Guy Trenholm replied, with a taunting smile.

I remembered that on the previous evening my son had gone out after dinner, saying that he would smoke a cigar in the shrubbery. It was not an unusual occurrence. Claire was in the habit of going up to the nursery for half an hour, I was in the habit of falling asleep, and Paul, generally speaking, found companionship in books. Now and then, however, he went out of doors, and remained till he heard the sound of Claire’s pianoforte.

Again I read the note. The handwriting was Paul’s, without doubt; so was the diction, and yet I was strangely conscious of feelings of disbelief—of unshaken trust in the honour of my son.

‘How did this fall into your hands?’ I inquired of the young man before me.

‘Ask the lady who promised six months ago to be my wife where she left it. My wife! no, never. . . . No, no, my fair cousin! you’re not the future Lady Trenholm yet. Good-morning, squire. Give my respects to your son, and tell him I’ll be even with him yet, before I’m ten days older.’

Guy Trenholm went away, and, as I turned to go indoors, I saw that Claire was walking up and down under the trees by the side of the lake. I did not go to her; I remembered that Paul would not be long, and I thought she might prefer being alone until his return.

Perhaps I had been sitting in the library an hour when Claire came in. She was pale and calm, and I saw that she had changed her dress.

‘Did Paul say whether he should return by Harrowby,’ she inquired, ‘or do you think he will go round by the Swynnerstone Road?’

‘He did not say, Claire; but I should think he will come by Harrowby. Are you going to meet him?’

‘I thought it probable that I might meet him. I am going out for a drive.’

‘Are you? Would it not be better to wait till after luncheon? Paul will be coming soon, and you may miss him. I cannot be sure which way he will return.’

'I should like to go now, father; it will do me good; I have a headache.'

As Claire spoke I noticed that her lips quivered, and that her eyes were unnaturally bright. She kissed me, and went away.

Half-past one was the hour for luncheon. The clock struck the half-hour, but neither my son nor my daughter had returned.

I went upstairs, thinking to pass a few minutes in the nursery with my little grand-daughter. I found the nursery empty, the windows open, and a look of confusion in the room.

Sherrard was in the hall when I came down. I asked him if he knew where Mrs. Mackelthwaite and the child were? He replied that Mrs. Hesildene had gone out for a drive, and had taken nurse and baby with her.

As the clock struck two, Brownson returned with the empty carriage. He had driven Mrs. Hesildene to the station, he said, and he had a note in his pocket for me. The note consisted of a few words, roughly scrawled in pencil on the back of an old envelope; the handwriting was Claire's. She thanked me for my kindness to her, and bade me assure my son that all search for her would be useless.

The note was still in my hand—I had hardly comprehended the full purport of it—when Paul came in.

He came into the room in a bright, cheery way—rather more noisily than was usual with him—and appeared surprised to see that the luncheon on the table was untouched.

‘Surely you haven’t waited for me?’ he said; ‘and where’s Claire? . . . There’s nothing wrong, father, is there?’

‘Sit down, Paul, and collect yourself, and prepare to hear of a good deal that is wrong.’

‘Don’t keep me in suspense,’ he said, turning pale. ‘Tell me at once if anything has happened to Claire or the child.’

‘They are both as well as they were when you left them this morning, I believe. I will be as brief as I can about other things. . . . Tell me first if that is your handwriting?’ I said, giving him the note that Guy Trenholm had brought.

Paul read it, and handed it back to me with a look of such mingled scorn and calmness and sorrow that I cannot forget it yet.

‘Yes, father,’ he said, ‘the writing is mine, with the exception of the date. I wrote that note six years ago. It was the last.’

I examined it again. I put on my spectacles and stepped out through the open window on to the terrace, and I saw that while the ink with which the note had been written was slightly brown and faded,

the date at the bottom was of a blue-black shade. Only three letters were in this fresher tint—the 'Aug.' Very skilfully had they been copied from the first three letters of Miss Trenholm's name at the top. I also saw that the figures were unlike my son's. There was a feminine look about them.

It was not surprising that these minutiae had not been perceived before. Claire's perceptions had been clouded by prejudice, Guy Trenholm's sight blinded by rage, mine was dimmed with increasing years.

'You have something more to tell me, father?' Paul said, when I re-entered the room. 'Has Claire seen this?'

I told him that she had. I told him all. . . . Then I showed him the few words that she had written to me from the station at Market-Studley.

Paul left the room. A few minutes later I saw him galloping down the avenue. He rode a fresh horse, I observed.

Later in the afternoon Lady Trenholm and Augusta came over.

I received them in the library. Lady Trenholm looked white and unnerved. Augusta seemed perplexed, annoyed, and ill at ease, but there was no consciousness of guilt on her face. She met my eye with a steady gaze throughout the interview.

When the usual greetings were over, there was silence. I felt that they had come on some special errand—some errand connected with the previous events of that terrible day; but it was not for me to open the subject, I thought. Lady Trenholm attempted to do so; but she was a weak woman, her courage failed; she said a few words, hesitated, trembled, and was silent.

Augusta rose from her chair and sat down on one nearer to me.

‘My cousin Guy was here this morning, was he not?’ she said, in a clear, calm voice.

‘He was, Miss Trenholm.’

‘He brought a note, I think, which he said he had found in the park—a note written and signed by your son, and addressed to me.’

‘He did.’

‘That note was written nearly six years ago. It was not dated. The date has been added recently.’

‘I am aware of this. I suppose your cousin Guy is not?’

‘He knows it now. He did not when he was here this morning.’

‘Did you know beforehand that he intended to come here?’

‘No; I wish I had. He came to me in such a passion of rage and jealousy that I did not think

proper to explain anything to him then. Soon afterwards he left the house, and I did not know where he had been till within the last hour.'

'Nearly six years ago it appears that the note was written. Has it been in your possession during that time?'

'Of that I know nothing. I am not, unfortunately, careful in such matters: I never know what becomes of my letters and papers. Had anyone asked me about this before to-day, I should have said that I had destroyed it at the time. I never remember seeing it since.'

'This is the work of an enemy,' I said.

'That is my opinion,' Lady Trenholm interposed in a thin voice. 'I am *sure* it is the work of an enemy. And yet, who *can* it be? and what *could* be anyone's motive for such an act as this?'

'I understood from your son this morning that an engagement exists between him and your niece, Lady Trenholm?'

'Yes, they are engaged——'

'Were engaged,' interrupted Miss Trenholm.

'Oh, *don't* say that, Augusta; *please* don't, my dear; you will break Guy's heart, and mine, too, if you do. It is my opinion that this would never have happened if you hadn't insisted upon keeping the engagement secret so long. And why you should have done so, I

don't know. I am sure you can't have had any real reason for being so obstinate about it.'

'But, my dear aunt, what *has* that to do with the matter in hand?'

'It may have much to do with it, Augusta—more than you or I can tell at present.'

'Aunt, you know something!' Miss Trenholm said, turning round sharply.

'*I?*—my *dear* child! Indeed I don't; I know nothing. How should I? I should never have heard a syllable about it but for you and Guy. And what your uncle will say about it when he comes home, I don't know. He *does* so hate things of this kind.'

Lady Trenholm began to shed tears, and then they rose to go. Miss Trenholm said she was sorry they had not found my son and daughter at home. Could I say how long they would be? she asked. Now that Guy was convinced that he had been duped by a trick, he was anxious to apologize to Mr. and Mrs. Hesildene.

I answered that it would be better for him to defer his apologies until the following day.

Soon after they had gone, my son returned. He had learnt at the station that his wife had taken two second-class tickets for London. She was accompanied by the nurse and child.

'You telegraphed, of course?' I asked.

'Yes; but it was too late to stop them at York. The train had just left. I sent another message to London, but I suppose the chances that it will ever reach her are very small.'

'What could be her motive for travelling second-class?'

'Economy, I am afraid, father. She has taken no money with her—nothing beyond the few pounds she had in her dressing-case.'

'You have made your inquiries at the station as carefully as possible, Paul?'

'I have, father. Will you give a word to the servants here? I must go now. I have no time to lose.'

'Are you going to London?'

'Yes. There is a train from Market-Studley at 6.30. I shall be just in time to catch the express at York.'

'Claire has no friends in London, has she?'

'Not one that I know of, except Brooke Cameron; she would not go to them now, if she had. If Cameron is at home I shall go to him.'

'Do, Paul: you will receive both help and comfort.'

CHAPTER III.

THE DAWN OF HOPE.

It was on August 24 that my son and daughter went away.

On the morning of the 25th Sir John and Guy Trenholm came over. They had heard nothing—I told them all. Sir John tried to offer sympathy, Guy tried to apologize; but they spoke as if the words froze on their lips.

On the 27th I received a letter from my son—a manly, self-restrained letter, but evidently written from a full heart. The telegraphic message which he had sent from Market-Studley had not been delivered, no lady answering to the name or description of his wife having arrived by the train he had specified. And he had not been able to obtain any clue to her whereabouts. He stated, further, that he was staying with Mr. Brooke Cameron, and that they were making every effort that could be made.

Till the end of September my son continued his search in London.

During that time I saw no one but the Rev. William Stanbrook, rector of this parish. He informed me that the neighbours all round were full of sympathy, but that the truth was not known to any but himself

and the family at Trenholm Park. It was generally supposed that there had been some quarrel between my son and his wife.

On the first day of October Sir John and Lady Trenholm, Guy, and Augusta left England for the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. On the day following my son returned to Neston-on-the-Wolds.

Less than six weeks he had been away. I have known men over whom six years of labour and sorrow have passed with less of physical effect.

And yet I know not what of hope or of courage upheld his spirit. Something there was within that gave him a strength and a dignity beyond anything that had been his before. Resignation it might be; if so, it was that virtue in its highest degree, and not the sickening, depressing, transient feeling that men so often mistake for resignation. 'I can bear my trouble,' a man will say, 'for I know that it is God's hand that lies so heavy upon my soul;' and yet he goes on his way with the sullen, dogged air of a prisoner going to gaol, with the hand of the policeman on his shoulder. Questionable is the submission in such cases as these.

It was not thus that my son accepted the inevitable. Before he had been in the house many hours I saw that, great as the weight of his grief was, he was equal to the burden; that he was living out of the

depths of an unshrinking soul, that the accumulated force and energy of years of true living was at hand to obey his will.

On the day after his arrival we discussed the plans for his future efforts. He thought it was possible that his wife might have gone back to France. He felt no conviction that she had done so, he knew that she had no friends—there, or elsewhere—to whom she would turn in such an hour as that wherein she had fled from her home ; but he thought it probable that she would imagine herself better able to elude search in her own country than amongst strangers.

Before the end of another month I was once more alone at Neston Hall ; my son was again a stranger in a strange land.

In the drawers of the table on which I now write are the numerous letters written to me by my son during that twelvemonth's wandering to and fro on the Continent. These letters contain evidence that he spared nothing. Time, strength, money—all were valueless, except in so far as they enabled him to continue his soul-wearying search. At first he wrote as if he possessed unlimited hope and energy ; determination marked the very turn of his sentences. Then it seemed as if he were restraining the natural force of his will ; he wrote calmly, and with more of faith than of hope. He was still pursuing his purpose,

he said, as steadfastly as ever; 'unhasting, yet un-resting,' from the dawn till far beyond the close of every day. In cathedrals and churches, in cities, and towns, and villages, in cottage homesteads, in seaside lodgings, in places likely and unlikely, no probable idea entered his mind that was not worked out to the utmost. More than once his heart was made to thrill with false hopes. People of whom he made inquiries answered vaguely, indecisively—awaking hope one moment only to crush it the next, and leaving him, finally, in a state of doubt and uncertainty that must have been unspeakably painful. Others, less cautious, and it might be more sympathizing, and seeing something, probably, of his sorrow and his earnestness, spoke more decisively than they could have had grounds for doing, causing him oft to travel hundreds of miles to find only fresh disappointment. Then, too, he was occasionally self-deceived. A face, a figure flitting past him in the street, or seen for one instant in a crowd, or at a window, would keep him hovering near the place for days or weeks. Then, perhaps, he would find at last that he had been mistaken, or the momentary vision would fade away until it was a thing too unreal for actual search.

A year passed away thus; and again the autumn leaves were red and brown and golden-green.

About this time Guy Trenholm was married to his

cousin, Augusta. The marriage took place in London, where Sir John and Lady Trenholm were residing in order that Lady Trenholm might have the advice of the best physicians. I was told that her health was failing rapidly.

In the early part of September my son wrote to me from Rouen. He stated that a few days previously he had crossed the river in a boat, and, just as he was approaching the opposite bank, a figure—so like Claire's that he thought there could hardly be any possibility of mistake—had passed along the quay within a few feet of him, and disappeared under the trees. He added that she held by the hand a child, apparently about two years old. He was, as usual, straining every nerve to obtain information.

Only two days later I received a letter written by my son's wife, and posted in the city of York.

She stated—coldly, briefly—that, finding herself unable to earn sufficient for the maintenance of herself and her child, she had at last decided that it would be easier to give up her little one to those who would nurture it in a manner befitting the station to which it was born than to hear it crying for bread. She commended it especially to my care, and she informed me that it would be brought to Neston-on-the-Wolds by trustworthy hands within a month from the date on which the letter was written.

I recalled my son by means of the electric telegraph.

During the month that followed he spent the greater part of his time in travelling to and fro between York and Market-Studley. When he was absent I, or one of my servants, watched the arrival of almost every train.

The months of September and October passed away. A feeling of unhopefulness settled down upon us both. Claire, we thought, had changed her mind; perhaps, at the last moment, she had found herself unable to give up all that she had saved out of the wreck of her happiness; or it might be that she had found means of earning sufficient bread.

The early days of November were wild and dark and stormy.

On the evening of one of those days Paul and I sat in the library. We had been looking over some accounts together; it was getting late, and just as we had decided to leave the remainder of the papers till the following day, we heard sounds of confusion in the hall. Presently Mrs. James, the housekeeper, burst into the room; she was followed by the lodge-keeper's wife, who carried in her arms Denise, my son's little daughter.

As Paul took the round, clinging, dark-eyed little creature in his arms, I saw most unmistakably that

his eyes were dimmed with tears. It was the only time that I ever knew him betray such weakness.

'Who brought her?' he inquired hurriedly of the women.

'That we can't say, sir,' Mrs. James replied, betraying, in the excitement of the moment, a tendency to use her native south-eastern patois more freely than was her wont—'that we can't say, sir. Mrs. Meyrick have brought her up from the lodge, and she *do say*, sir, that she believe it was Mrs. Hesildene herself that brought the baby in and put it down by the fire in the lodge, and went away again in a minute; but she can't say for certain, sir, because she were in the back room tryin' to paycify poor little Tommy, and she didn't see nothin', only a black dress and a gray cloak rushin' out at the door, and the child standin' on the rug, wrapped in all them shawls and things. And that shawl that's underneath is a real cashmere, sir—one that Mrs. Hesildene set great store by. It's happened very strange, indeed it has; but she *is* a fine baby. I never see such cheeks and limbs this many a long year.'

'Will you take charge of her for to-night, Mrs. James? . . . Father, I am going into Market-Studley.'

When Mrs. James and Mrs. Meyrick had divested

my little grand-daughter of the numerous wrappings that enveloped her, and placed the tiny thing on the rug by the cheerful fire, she looked from them to me with much amazement, but apparently without any alarm. Then I held out my arms to her, and she ran to me with a smile so like her mother's that I felt a momentary pang of indescribable pain.

'Oh, Claire, Claire, what a strange little wife and mother you are!' I said to myself as I stroked the soft, silky brown hair that hung round the shoulders of the baby on my knee.

But, as I have said before, it was late in the evening, and Denise had been left to the care of Mrs. James. That worthy woman had left the room with Mrs. Meyrick after my son went away: in a few minutes she returned with some food, and then she insisted upon taking the winsome, round-cheeked little girl to bed.

My son came back shortly after midnight. He was cold, wet with snow and sleet, tired and slightly depressed. He had not been able to trace the person who had brought his child to the South Lodge.

A few days later we were fortunate enough to meet with a suitable nurse for my little grand-daughter. Our life grew to be painfully like the life of the old time. Only one wide void was left unfilled.

Much as my son Paul delighted in the presence of

his little Denise, I could not induce him to remain quietly at home. He felt certain now that his wife was in England — 'she would never put the sea between herself and her only treasure,' he said. He must find her; it could not be impossible. He would search every town, village and hamlet, from Land's End to Berwick-on-Tweed, if length of days were given him for such a task. He spoke rashly, I fear, as people often speak who have enough of energy to go on hoping against hope.

Again Paul went out from me; but I was not now so lonely as before. Sweet little baby-words, merry peals of laughter, patterings to and fro of tiny feet, rooms strewn with toys and picture-books, other children across from the Rectory, 'tea-parties' in the nursery. The days seemed to pass with such wonderful quickness that I was half astonished when the spring came.

During the winter Lady Trenholm had died, and in the month of April my friend Sir John was thrown from his horse and killed. Sir Guy and his wife came down to Trenholm Park to reside until the days of their mourning were over. They did not remain long, and I was glad when they went away. I never met them without feeling a rush of painful memories.

Time passed on till the third summer of Denise's life began to fade into autumn. Several times during the intervening months my son had come over to Neston to rest from his wandering for a few days, looking more sad, more haggard each time. Nothing that I could urge had ever caused him to waver from his purpose, even for a single moment. He never faltered. Nay, it seemed to me that every month of pain and disappointment did but strengthen his tenacious clinging to the idea that seemed to absorb his every thought. Had he been other than he was, I had feared the result of this intense concentration.

It was on the second day of September that my son came home last year. I believe he came with the intention of making a longer stay than usual. His health appeared to be giving way, his face was pale and worn-looking, and his dark hair was streaked with threads of gray. He had just entered upon his thirtieth year—his appearance was that of an overwrought man of forty-five.

He came unexpectedly; but for several reasons I was unusually glad to see him.

My strongest motives for desiring his presence were connected with pecuniary matters. His unlimited expenditure during the three previous years, and the repurchase of a large portion of the Harrowby estate,

which I had just concluded, made it necessary for me to determine once more upon a year or two of strict economy. I knew that it would be impossible for me to continue the frequent and enormous remittances to Paul without serious inconvenience, and I was glad to have an opportunity of explaining these things to him personally. As I waited for a favourable moment, I felt a growing conviction that it would be very good for him to be compelled to remain inactive for a few months.

But to this day I have to regret that I delayed this simple matter too long. Within a very few days after Paul's arrival he received a letter from Mr. Brooke Cameron. The letter was written from Brussels, and the writer stated that he had seen a lady in the church of Ste. Gudule whom he believed to have been my son's wife. He did not write with any degree of certainty; he had only caught a passing glance of the lady, but the resemblance was so strong, he said, that he should not have felt justified in withholding the slight gleam of hope which my son would doubtless be able to extract from his communication.

Paul had been out all day. I had forgotten to give the letter to him when he first came in, but I remembered it as we sat at dinner. It was not a long letter: he read it over without remark, and then laid it aside till the servants had left the room. I observed

that he was thoughtful after reading it, and that he ate very little food.

As soon as we were alone he gave the letter to me to read. The contents of it irritated me. Vague as the information was, I knew that nothing but an immediate journey to Brussels would satisfy my son; and I knew also that if he were once again on the Continent his return would be as uncertain as ever. It was exasperating. Another tour as expensive as the last would frustrate all my plans, and probably compel me to make sacrifices that would materially affect, not only my interests, but Paul's. And all this for what? For the sake of affording him the means of going in search of fresh and certain disappointment. I had no doubt whatever that Mr. Cameron had been mistaken. Not one sentence of his letter was weighted with conviction. I did not blame him for writing. He had stated the facts so simply and so entirely without exaggeration that blame was impossible.

I put the letter on the table and waited for my son to speak. I could not trust myself to do so. The feelings of annoyance that were rising within me were strong: I wished to prevent them from rising into anger, if I could.

'Of course I must go at once!' Paul said with eagerness.

'I do not see that there is any "of course" in the matter,' I replied; 'and if you will listen to me for a few moments I will at last speak to you plainly. I had intended to do so before this letter came.'

There was an uncontrollable harshness in my voice. I spoke with an effort, and in a way that was widely different from my original intention. The consciousness of these things added a sense of mortification and disappointment to my feelings of irritability.

Paul looked surprised. I had not spoken to him in tones like these for many years.

'What is it that you wish to say to me, father?' he inquired, with something of dignity in his manner.

'In the first place, I wish to ask if you have any idea of the total amount of the money that you have spent during the last three years?'

'No, I have no idea at all; but I know that it must be something very considerable.'

I named a sum rather under than over the actual truth. Paul's astonishment was great.

I then explained to him the facts to which I have already alluded. Had I done this in a spirit of contemperation, no one would have seen the force of my reasoning more readily than he; but calmness had failed me from the first; and the quiet dignity with which my son listened and replied to me had an effect the reverse of tranquillizing.

When I had concluded my statements there was a short silence: it was broken by Paul: 'Then I suppose you mean me to understand that you refuse to advance me the money necessary for the journey I wish to take?'

'I do.'

Paul rose from his chair, and walked two or three times across the end of the room; when he sat down again his face was flushed, and in his voice there was a quiver of pain.

'You have considered this well, father?' he said; 'you do not forget what is at stake?'

'I forget nothing. If I thought that there was the smallest possibility of this journey ending in anything but disappointment, you should go to-night. On such an uncertainty as this I will not throw away sixpence.'

'You have said that you forget nothing, father; surely there is one thing that you fail to remember. Why is it that to-night I am a pauper, dependent upon you for my daily bread?'

My son Paul was grief-stung, or he would never have uttered such words as these. They smote me through and through. His allusion was to the fortune he should have inherited from his mother. Thinking to double it for him by the time he was of age, I had sunk it in waters that filled Welsh mines years ago.

I need not recall the harsh and inconsiderate words in which I replied to my son, or those of unguarded bitterness in which he retaliated. My self-control failed me utterly at the last; and speaking, not from my heart, but from a brain fevered with passion, and scarcely conscious of the import of my words, I accused him of having given his wife cause for the step she had taken. A few hours later I would have given all I possessed if I could have recalled these false, unjust, envenomed words.

For a few seconds Paul looked at me as if he had hardly grasped the full meaning of what I had said. Then the flush of anger died rapidly out of his face; he became pallid. His eye pierced mine with a glance that was like the flash of steel; and then, turning slowly away, he left the room. . . . I have not seen my son since; neither do I know whether he is amongst the living or the dead.

He did not leave the house immediately. I heard him go upstairs to the nursery; I learnt that he had also gone to his own room. Then he descended the stairs, crossed the hall, unbarred the door, and went out.

In the course of the evening Sherrard brought me a telegraphic message addressed to Mr. Paul Hesildene. It was open. Sherrard explained that my son had

met the messenger on the Market-Studley road, had read the paper by the light from a cottage window, and had sent it on for my perusal.

The message was from Mr. Brooke Cameron, and consisted of these words :

'I have again seen the lady whom I took to be Mrs. Hesildene. I was mistaken.'

Paul had read this, and yet he had not returned. Alas! alas! for my bitter words.

But of what use were the self-tormentings, the self-reproaches in which I indulged for weeks—nay, months—after that unhappy night? Could they undo the work I had done? Could they bring my son back to me again? These questions are idle and useless, but not more so than my too late repentance.

Very keen are the stings that lie in self-inflicted sorrows.

It has added to my grief that, since my son went out from me in sorrow and anger, I have felt my heart drawn to him more strongly than ever before. True are the words spoken by a friar in one of the plays of Shakespeare :

' For it so falls out
That what we have we prize not to the worth
Whiles we enjoy it, but being lack'd and lost,
Why, then we rack the value, then we find

The virtue that possession would not show us
Whiles it was ours.'

Two sources of alleviation are mine in this time of trial—the companionship of my little grand-daughter, whose beauty and sweetness are such as to call forth words of admiration from all who see her, and the friendship of Mr. Stanbrook, our rector. He is a good man, and I think his goodness is of a rare kind; for it must require unusual powers of self-denial to enable a cheerful-hearted, sociable man, of barely middle age, to leave his pleasant fireside on cold winter evenings, for the sake of coming to sit with a saddened, conscience-stricken old man like myself.

Latterly I have looked forward to his coming with much eagerness; for I find that after he has left me, the little gleams of hope which he tries to kindle do not die out and fade into gray ashes so suddenly as they used to do.

I am not so sanguine as he with regard to the future; but I am beginning to feel a strange assurance that it will yet be 'light at eventide.'

'God hath wrought things as incredible
For His people of old: what hinders now?'

TAUGHT BY ADVERSITY.

A STORY OF A ROUGH WINTER.

· Quaint old town of toil and traffic, quaint old town of fish and
jet!
Memories haunt thy faded roof-trees that I never can forget.·

CHAPTER I.

THE WINDS BEGIN TO BLOW.

· They that be slain with the sword are better than they that
be slain with hunger.'—*Lamentations* iv. 9.

It is an autumn evening, and I sit alone on a seat in front of the Crown Hotel, South Cliff, Danesborough. The sun is setting grandly; a broad stream of crimson and burnished gold glitters across the sea; fiery clouds, heavily shaded with purple, drift rapidly along the south-western sky, foretelling a 'dusty night,' as the sailors say. But the breeze is only rising now; the fishing-boats in the bay are as yet perfectly motionless, and the reflections of the

dark masts and the ochry sails lie deep and unbroken in the smooth water.

Down on the Spa the visitors are assembling for their evening promenade. The ladies move gracefully along the terraces to the strains of *Il Bacio*. Scarlet cloaks and light dresses gleam out conspicuously from the confused masses of gay colouring. The gas-jets in the Pavilion begin to twinkle. Misty shadows steal over the North Cliff and the old town. The chill breeze rises steadily; the fishing-boats begin to rock to and fro with a slow uncertain motion. As the darkness increases, lights shimmer from the ocean, from the town, and from the windows of the lodging-houses immediately behind me.

Presently I observe that a tall, thin, gray-bearded man is walking restlessly up and down the road. As he passes under a gas-lamp, I perceive that, although he is shabbily dressed, there is in his manner and appearance something that tells plainly of 'better days.' A sympathetic feeling rises within me: I watch the man closely. To my astonishment he stops, turns his back to the sea, stands with folded arms, looks up to the balcony windows, and in a clear, rich, cultivated voice begins to sing a plaintive old English ballad.

Money is thrown to the singer; as he takes it up, I see that one hand is gloved, the other white as the

hand of a lady. A shiver runs through me as he turns away. 'Not impossible,' I say to myself, 'that this man's lot in life may yet be mine.' It is a cowardly thought, but its influence is only momentary.

I had been in Danesborough three hours; two of which I had spent on the cliff, watching—almost unconsciously—the scenes which I have tried to describe, and endeavouring to shape into something like settled form my plans for the future. It had been a work of difficulty; for I was poor, friendless, unknown, and—ambitious.

My ambition was only a secondary feeling. The primary ones were disappointed hope, crushed affection, keen remorse.

I have confessed to the indulgence of a cowardly thought; it may be that I shall have many such to confess, and yet mine is no coward's soul. Never before had I been pressed down by such a burden as that which was upon me as I sat on the cliff at Danesborough; and never had I felt greater determination, higher resolve, stronger faith, than I felt as I began to perceive with clear vision a possible path to a worthy future. No exultation stirred my spirit; I was subdued: there was solemnity in the hour, for I knew that

'Seldom comes the moment
In life, which is indeed sublime and weighty.
To make a great decision possible,
Oh! many things, all transient and all rapid,
Must meet at once: and haply, they thus met
May by that confluence be enforced to pause
Time long enough for wisdom, though too short,
Far, far too short a time for doubt and scruple!'

Such a moment was with me then. My resolve was taken. I would be an artist; thus fulfilling the brightest dream of my youth, and enabling myself to carry out the fixed purpose of my manhood.

This resolve was not taken lightly. I was conscious of the difficulties before me, and of the disadvantages against which I should have to struggle. It was years since I had touched either brush or pencil; I had never had any real grounding, and I was not now in a position to devote my time solely to the remedying of those untoward circumstances. What was best to be done? Rapidly I decided that only one course was open to me—I must give lessons in elementary drawing by day, and study by night.

There was still, of course, much obscurity over the path that I had marked out for myself; but, as someone has wisely said, we generally have 'light enough for the next step.' The step immediately before me was the prosaic one of seeking lodgings. These—

after much difficulty—I found in St. Alban's Gate, and then went up to the station for my port-manteau.

The next day, after inserting an advertisement for pupils in the local newspapers, and expending nearly two-thirds of the money I possessed in the purchase of drawing and painting materials, I went out for the purpose of selecting one or two of the most likely subjects for study. I decided that my first attempt should be made from the North Cliff; taking in the castle, the peninsular foreland on which it stands, the bay below, and a glimpse of the sea beyond. I was eager to begin. The old true love of Art stirred within me. Poverty urged me. And desire to deprive a scarcely-merited reproach of its sting aroused a feeling which I have already termed ambition. Perhaps this may not be the right name for it; but the most genuine love of Fame for its own sake could not have acted as a stronger stimulus.

I worked hard. The weather was fine, and for some days I studied out of doors from sunrise to sunset. On the whole I believe that my work was very tolerable, considering the numerous disadvantages under which I laboured, but at the time I was far from satisfied with it. I thought the drawing feeble, the execution unequal; and there was a want

of tone and keeping about my sketches which, for some time, I strove in vain to remedy.

But other difficulties than those connected with my studies began to rise up before me. Day after day I went to the bookseller's where I had left my address, and who had kindly offered to exhibit my sketches, and each day my inquiries met the same reply. The sketches were much admired, but they did not sell, and there had been no applications in answer to my advertisement.

I was unused to poverty. I had heard and read of her as a 'stern teacher,' and I began to find from experience that the epithet had not been misapplied.

The third week of my stay in Danesborough was drawing to a close. So far I had paid Miss Braye—my curious little landlady—with punctuality, and had been able to provide for myself actual necessaries in the way of food, but the means of continuing to do so were not mine. On the Thursday evening as I sat alone in my painting-room, I spread out on the table before me the whole of the money I possessed, and I found that when I had put aside sufficient to pay for my lodging during the current week, and bought a pair of much-needed boots, I should not have more than a few shillings left. I sat thinking a long time. Should I give up at once, or should I wait the chances of the next few days? I decided upon the

latter. I also decided not to dine at my lodgings again for the present. I would satisfy my hunger with a roll or a biscuit purchased at the pastrycook's. Miss Braye looked distressed when I explained to her so much of my intention as was needful for her to know. The poor little woman was afraid that I was dissatisfied with her cooking; but I soon reassured her on this point.

The next day I completed and mounted a little sketch of Falsgrove. I took it to the bookseller's on the Saturday morning, and to my joy I found a note awaiting me. It was written by a lady, and stated that Mrs. Dormer and Miss Hetherington would be obliged if A. Z. would call at No. —, Blenheim Terrace, on Monday afternoon, at five o'clock.

I was punctual to the moment, but I found that the appointment had been forgotten. 'The ladies had gone to a picnic party,' the servant said. I went again the following morning; they were on the sands, but they had left word that I was to call in the evening.

The third time I was more successful. I was shown into a room where three ladies and two gentlemen were sitting. For the first time in my life I felt what a difficult feeling pride is to master.

The younger of the two gentlemen addressed me first. He informed me that his wife, Mrs. Dormer,

and her sister, Miss Hetherington, wished to make two or three drawings of the town and neighbourhood before they went away, and having seen some sketches of mine, they thought it probable that I might be able to afford them some assistance. They were possessed of much artistic talent, he said, and had on more than one occasion exhibited their drawings. 'Diana dear, bring your portfolio,' Mr. Dormer concluded.

But before Mrs. Dormer left the room, I expressed some doubts as to my ability to afford them any help. I reminded them that I had advertised specially for pupils requiring elementary instruction.

'Oh yes, we quite understand,' exclaimed Miss Hetherington. 'You will see exactly what we want when my sister brings her portfolio. . . . Bring mine, too, Diana, will you?'

The sketches that were shown to me were views of English lake scenery, of Scotch Highlands, and of Welsh watering-places, and, as I saw at a glance, were drawn with an executive power that could only have been acquired by constant practice and long experience. There was very little difference in the style of the drawings by the two sisters. They exhibited the same ease of handling, the same firm, powerful touch—degenerating into hardness occasionally—and, in the same degree, they lacked all

sign of originality or imaginative power. I explained these things as clearly as I could, in answer to Mrs. Dormer's somewhat haughty demand for my opinion.

For a moment I feared that I had been overtruthful; but Mrs. Dormer's reply convinced me that I had been mistaken in this.

'Exactly,' she said. 'If you should fail as an artist, I should recommend you to set up for an art-critic. The faults you point out are precisely those we are most conscious of, and most anxious to overcome; and this confession will explain our motive in sending for you. It is no use your pleading inability,' she continued, observing that I was about to speak. 'Your sketches are slight—very slight; but there is a grace and a poetry about them that we have long wished to acquire, whilst ours, as you perceive, are as matter-of-fact as if they had been done by the rule-of-three.'

'When shall you be disengaged?' inquired Miss Hetherington.

I replied that my time was at my own disposal.

'Then you have no other pupils?' Mrs. Dormer exclaimed, in surprise.

I said that I had not, and I also explained that I had only been in the town a few weeks; but I saw that my avowal had produced an unfavourable effect.

'Then, if you are not otherwise engaged, will you

call here on Thursday morning?' said Mrs. Dormer. 'We may be able to go out sketching, or we may not; but, as your time is altogether unoccupied, I dare say it won't matter if you have to call again.'

'You forget, dear, we promised the Gordons to drive to Hunmanby on Thursday,' said Miss Hetherington.

'So we did, Laura. Then suppose we say Friday—Friday morning at eleven o'clock. Eleven will suit us best, won't it, dear?'

'Yes, I should think so.'

This arrangement, and some others of a pecuniary nature, concluded, I left the house, struggling against the natural but contemptible feeling of mortified pride. Superciliousness, innate vulgarity, and want of refinement I had seen before; personal acquaintance added both weight and meaning to these characteristics. It might be that consciousness of poverty and the restraint and awkwardness of a new position made me more than ordinarily perceptive of these things. Perhaps, also, the fact that I was getting sadly out of condition from want of proper food had some connection with the unusual sensations that I was beginning to experience.

This was Tuesday. Till Friday I went on as usual, sketching in water-colours out-of-doors by day, and working at a study in oil by night. The subject of

this study was broken water ; it decided me as to the direction of my future labours.

I remember vividly the beauty of the September morning on which I walked up the Castle Hill with Mrs. Dormer and Miss Hetherington. The air was clear and cool, the sun shone out gloriously over the wide expanse of land and sea, the blue ether was flecked with little white cloudlets, the water was one broad sweep of pure, unstirred, unshaded blue, dotted here and there with a tiny white sail, or, closer in shore, with the dark hull and bare poles of a brig or a schooner riding at anchor.

‘What a lovely scene!’ exclaimed Mrs. Dormer, turning round as we neared the top of the hill. ‘I am so glad we decided upon this, Laura.’

Truly the scenery was lovely—very lovely ; but, perhaps, at that moment I was scarcely able to appreciate its beauties at their highest value, for I saw that it was of a nature to test the powers of the most experienced draughtsman. My self-confidence—of which I had never had great store—began to fail most lamentably as Mrs. Dormer pointed out to me the wide extent of sea and landscape which they wished to include in a single sketch. They had decided, she said, to take in the view from the parish church to the coast line beyond Oliver’s Mount.

For the benefit of the few who are unacquainted with Danesborough, I will state that this included two-thirds of the densely-packed, quaintly-roofed houses of which the old town is composed; the line of hills beyond; a portion of the beach strewn with visitors and bathing-machines; the Cliff Bridge; the Spa, the Saloon, the Tower; the South Cliff, and the rows of houses above; Oliver's Mount in the distance; the sea, the harbour, the piers, and the shipping; with a dockyard, and the roofs of some factory-like buildings for a foreground.

As Mrs. Dormer and Miss Hetherington began promptly to arrange their camp-stools, shawls, and sketching materials, the former lady inquired pragmatically whether I had met with a good sale for my sketches.

I replied that I had not.

'Then I hope you have been successful in meeting with other pupils?' she continued in the same tone.

Again my reply was a negative one.

'Dear me! it is rather singular, is it not?' she went on. 'Have you ever given lessons before?'

'No, madam; I have never found it necessary to do so until now.'

'Really! then I dare say you will be quite at a loss how to proceed. Perhaps we may be of use to you. We have had lessons from one of the most noted

Royal Academicians of the day—Mr. Page Glynwood. What system had you thought of adopting?—though, of course, as you have not had any experience, you will not have been enabled to decide what system is best; so, for the present, you had better adopt the one we have been accustomed to. Mr. Glynwood never varies from it, and he is one of the most successful teachers that ever gave a lesson.'

'So I believe.'

'Do you know him?'

'Only from hearsay. . . . Will you describe his method of teaching?'

'I was about to do so; it is very simple. He sketches the outline first, and we watch him whilst he does this—and a treat it is to watch him, I assure you; for anything so free and masterly as his method of handling the pencil I never saw. Then we put in our outlines, working from the scene before us, of course, but referring to his sketch if necessary. Then he begins to colour, and we are at liberty to watch him, or to go on with our own drawings, just as we choose. We generally prefer the former—there is so much more to be learnt—and then he lends us his sketch to work from afterwards.'

By this time we were all ready. Mrs. Dormer and Miss Hetherington sat, pencil in hand, one on either side, waiting for me to begin. I hardly know how to

describe the sensations I felt. I was not nervous—I am not a nervous subject—but every feeling of artistic fervour, every particle of belief in my own ability, and even my strength, and my exceptionally keen eyesight, seemed to fail me. At that moment I would have given every penny of the last few shillings I possessed for a glass of good wine. My hand trembled visibly as I began drawing the faint outline of Oliver's Mount and the distant hills. India-rubber came into use, I grew desperate, I reasoned with myself, I tried to forget Mr. Glynwood's facility, and the fact that two pairs of critical eyes were following the point of my pencil in its uncertain movements, but I tried in vain. My powers, mental and bodily, were weakened by much sorrow and by want of food; the consciousness of my inexperience was strong within me; certain failure was before me; I put my pencil down on the edge of my sketching-block with a feeling of despair.

Mrs. Dormer broke into a low, unfeeling laugh, which she tried to smother with her glove. Miss Hetherington took up her board, and with a facile, rapid pencil sketched in the outline of the view from the Cliff Bridge to the sea.

'There!' she said, 'I mean to content myself with that to-day.'

I believed then—and I believe yet—that Miss Hetherington felt something like pity for me. It

was not a pleasant belief, but it helped me to recover myself. I resumed my pencil, and sketched in as much of the outline as she had done. Mrs. Dormer did the same.

We began colouring. Almost all sense of inferiority and inability vanished. I worked rapidly, feverishly, and with little judgment; but I perceived from the remarks of the two ladies that they were gleaning a considerable amount of new insight, and that it was of a kind that they were most eager to obtain. Mrs. Dormer bade Miss Hetherington observe that my sketch, slight as it was, had 'atmosphere'; that my sea had surface, and depth, and transparency; and that my shipping was buoyant, and sat brooding on the water with unusual gracefulness.

Between two and three hours we sat on the Castle Hill. The sketches were completed, and we rose to go. I accompanied the ladies to the door of their lodging, and arranged to meet them on St. Nicholas' Cliff at two o'clock on the afternoon of the following Monday. They wished to make a sketch of Filey Brigg. The distance was seven and a half miles, they informed me, and they would of course engage a carriage. Would I accompany them? Mrs. Dormer inquired. I consented to do so, and we parted.

The following day—Saturday—I walked over to Filey, and, by way of preparation, made two rough

sketches of the Brigg, from different points of view. It was a cold, cloudy, depressing day, and I suffered grievously from hunger, but I dared not expend one penny of the few shillings that I possessed; they were all that I had to offer Miss Braye for my week's lodging. I walked back to Danesborough in the evening, tired, lame with the pressure of my new, cheap, ill-made boots, and almost faint from inanition. As I passed a large, fashionable hotel, still crowded with visitors, the smell of rich and tempting food issued from the open windows. I felt hysterical as a girl, and I reached my lodgings with much difficulty.

As I entered the house, little Ruth gave me a note which had been left during the day. It was from Mrs. Dormer. She stated that they had received a telegram which necessitated their immediate return to London. A small sum of money was enclosed—it was less than the sum that had been agreed upon: Mrs. Dormer hoped I should consider it sufficient payment for the instruction they had received. For a moment I longed to return it; but I considered that if I added to it the few shillings which I already possessed, the sum total would be sufficient to pay for my lodging. Fortunately my sense of justice was stronger than my pride.

CHAPTER II.

A DEATH-WHITE MIST.

‘For a genuine man it is no evil to be poor.’

CARLYLE.

It was no smooth, untroubled career that I had promised myself as I sat in front of the Crown Hotel on the first evening of my life at Danesborough. I had said to myself, ‘You will have to labour hard and incessantly, and it may be that the very work which seems now as if it would be all pleasure will itself come to be a weariness and a pain. You will have to contend with difficulties unaided. You will have to endure poverty, and hardship, and loneliness; and underlying all these there will still be the sick heart-hunger that has so long and so plainly craved to be satisfied. Think of these things, weigh them well beforehand. Endeavour to find out before it is too late whether you have enough strength of soul to justify your entering into such a contest as the one before you.’

All this I had done. I had accepted the conditions. I found now that my imagination had drawn a faint and feeble picture of the trials that were to be mine. Did I regret my decision? would I at any moment have put the wheels of time back to the evening

on which it was made, if the chance had been given me? No; a thousand times—no.

The month of October was ushered in by a brisk gale from the north-north-east. Three days it lasted, and almost every hour of those three days I spent on the pier or the beach making studies of the heavy surf that was tossing and heaving in the bay. I forgot my troubles—my heart was absorbed in my work; I even forgot to be hungry as long as the daylight lasted. When evening came I used to saunter about the cliffs for awhile, often near the Cliff Bridge, watching intently the visitors as they came and went. Then I used to return to my lodging, and partially satisfy my hunger with a small quantity of coarse food. Not possessing one single penny of my own, I had asked Miss Braye to provide me with actual necessaries during this week, begging her to be as economical as possible. She had done this. The week was drawing to a close. I was still penniless. Knowing that no other alternative was left to me, I went to a small jeweller's shop in one of the main streets, and sold the only article of value I possessed—an old-fashioned watch that had belonged to my mother. My sorrow at being compelled to do this was great. It depressed me. No other recent trial had had the same effect, not even for an hour.

A week of glorious weather followed—'a St. Martin's summer,' little Miss Braye pronounced it to be. During this week another note was left for me at the bookseller's. It was written by a widow lady, who was lodging at a small house in the North Marine Road. She had a little son who was lame—confined to the sofa, she said: would I state what my terms would be for teaching him to amuse himself by drawing? I called upon the lady, and agreed to give the little fellow a lesson every other morning. This I continued to do till the end of their short stay; but the lady, like myself, was poor. I assured her that I considered myself amply repaid by her thanks and her little son's progress.

The visitors were beginning to disappear. The days were growing shorter, and less favourable for outdoor sketching. My hopes of success as a teacher began to fade rapidly. Again I felt doubtful about the future, and again Poverty laid her cold hand upon my shoulder. Only half a crown was left of the money that I had received for my mother's watch.

One evening I changed this half-crown, and paid sixpence for a ticket for the Spa. It was not a prudent thing to do, perhaps, but I was actuated by stronger motives than those of prudence.

I went down to the promenade. Chill and gusty as the evening was, there were many people walking

up and down. I sauntered along in front of the colonnade first. Ladies were sitting there; some dressed richly, some plainly, some were young, others old. Amongst them all there was no face that had any special interest for me.

Then I crossed to the other side, and stood leaning against the wall on the sea-board of the promenade. For some time I stood looking out across the ocean, watching the glimmer of the lights on board the passing vessels, and listening to the low plash of the waves as they broke on the strand. Then I turned and stood watching the people as they moved to and fro, the gas-jets twinkling in the Pavilion, and listening to the brilliant overture that was being performed by the band.

I remained there for a considerable time; then I decided to go back to my work. I would return by the Cliff, I thought; but as I recrossed the promenade, I was startled by seeing a face that I was certain I had seen before. It was the face of a tall, stately woman, with dark eyes that flashed in the glow of the light from the Pavilion, and made strange contrast with her pallid cheeks. Who was she? Where and when had I seen her? I could remember nothing that would help me to answer these questions. I decided to remain on the promenade a few minutes longer.

Presently the stately figure returned. I noticed rapidly that she was dressed in mourning, and that an elderly and infirm lady was leaning on her arm. They passed across the well-lighted space, close to where I stood. The tall figure half turned, the dark eyes flashed into mine, the pale face grew paler. I was recognised.

Again those two people passed into the crowd beyond, and I saw them no more that evening. But my curiosity had been stimulated to the utmost. The pale face and the flashing eyes haunted me all night.

I spent the greater part of the following day at the Spa. Involuntarily, and without any reasonable ground for so doing, I had connected the sad face that I had seen on the previous evening with some of the saddest events of my own life. Nothing was clear or distinct to me; but I was strongly persuaded of the fact that I had seen the woman in a certain atmosphere.

The morning and the afternoon passed slowly; the evening shadows began to fall. I felt somewhat excited as I watched the people reassemble, and again begin to pass to and fro along the broad promenade. Again the lights glittered, again the music sounded. Hope whispered in my ear once more. I determined that if the person who had moved me so strangely

should reappear, I would find some plausible excuse for speaking to her.

The crowd began to thicken. I stood in the same place, and in the same position, with regard to the light, as I had done on the previous evening. I had not long to wait. Again I saw the two figures crossing the open space. I recognised them at once; and it seemed to me that the pale and stately woman was paler and statelier than ever. Who could she be? I had an instinctive idea that she was not a lady in the general acceptation of the term; and yet she was altogether unlike any servant that I had ever seen. As I stood thus, trying to smooth out my perplexed ideas, she passed so close to me that I felt the movement of her dress. I observed that her mouth was firmly closed, and that the lower part of her face expressed the most rigid determination. She did not appear to be in any way conscious of my presence.

Ten minutes longer I stood in the same place. Again I saw her approaching, but this time she was quite alone; and she had exchanged her slow and graceful movement for a step so quick and decisive that I could not at first be quite certain as to her identity. She walked up to me in a manner so direct as to convince me at once that I had been seen before. Then she fixed her large black eyes full on my face,

and, without speaking, held out to me a folded paper. I took it, and she turned away before I had time to utter a single word.

I read the note by the light of the lamps above the colonnade. It was written in a clear, round handwriting, evidently with much care: it was easy to read as Franklin type. The words were these:

‘I shall be on the North Sands to-morrow evening at half-past eight. Will you meet me there? I will tell you everything.’

Not for years before had I felt my heart beat at such a rapid pace as it did when I read these few and simple words. ‘Everything!’—it was a word of wide meaning, truly; but what depths of special meaning might it not have for me? ‘Everything!’ I repeated it twenty times as I walked back to my lodging.

I worked at my study of ‘Waves at the Harbour Mouth’ with unusual energy that night—worked on till a late hour in the morning. Sleep was impossible. I lay tossing on my bed for an hour or two, and then, almost before daylight, I rose and went down to the South Sands for my usual morning plunge. I went back to breakfast with even more than ordinary appetite. So full of life and hope I was that for a few minutes I indulged in a dream of a couple of eggs. But I repressed my sensual longings. The

smallest current coin of the realm was becoming an object of almost superstitious regard.

All that day I worked indoors. I worked well and cheerfully, yet still the day seemed longer than any autumn day I had ever known. Twilight and gas-lamps, darkness and moonlight, followed each other very tardily. But at last the clocks struck eight. Ten minutes later I was sauntering up and down amongst the dripping stones, and the tangled, wet seaweed, on the sands to the north of Danesborough.

It was a beautiful night. Dark heavy clouds, crested with light, floated over the purple heather. A broad stream of silver moonlight glittered on the surface of the ocean. On either side

‘ A mist-like shadow was upon the sea,
From out of which strange ghost-like ships did come,
And gliding o'er the shining, starry track
Again passed quickly into gloom and shade.’

The tide was creeping slowly from the sand with a gentle motion, and a low murmuring sound that was inexpressibly soothing. The night wind was rising and falling, rushing and sweeping over the rocks. Something there was in the scene—a sense of mystery, of voiceless sympathy, voiceless and yet expressive of deepest meanings, and capable of stirring questioning thoughts never to be answered in this world.

Judging by the receding tide, I must have wandered up and down the sands for nearly two hours before I would acknowledge to myself that further wandering would be useless. I grew weary, very weary. Disappointment chilled me, hunger pains sapped my vigour; the thought of going back to my cheerless lodging, to my solitary painting-room, depressed me. For a time I felt as if I had hardly sufficient physical strength to enable me to leave the sands. As I turned to go, I observed a long low sea-worn stone lying temptingly under the cliff: I sat down on it to rest awhile. Wearied with sorrow and fatigue, I fell asleep. When I awoke, dark shadows were upon the sea, chill winds were rushing round me; the moon was obscured by black clouds. Before I reached St. Alban's Gate the clocks struck the hour of midnight.

During the following days I haunted the Spa, the cliffs and the sands incessantly, but without success. I did not again see in Danesborough the woman who had so stirred the depths of sorrow that were in my soul.

A few days passed on; by the first week in November I had reached almost the lowest degree of want. Chill mists brooded over land and sea. The days were short and dark and cold. I was ill-

protected from the weather, having been compelled to sell several articles of clothing to purchase food enough to keep me from starvation. But these were minor ills: I could bear them with a certain degree of cheerful stoicism; others I had that weighed upon me far more heavily.

One of the greatest of these was the fact that I had become indebted to Miss Braye. For three weeks I had been unable to pay for my lodging; but for this I should not have remained longer in Danesborough. I could not go away in debt. If there was any truth in the saying that 'the darkest hour is just before the dawn,' surely I might expect that Fortune would turn her wheel a little in my favour very soon.

It was also a source of much grief to me that my health, and consequently my powers of continued application, began to give way. I struggled earnestly. I longed to work. I was conscious of the ability, the capacity, the power that was in me; but I had not enough of vitality left to use the power. I strove helplessly to realize the visions of my brain, to interpret to others the language in which Nature spoke in such thrilling tones to me. Brilliant fire-light gleams of light flashed out from my imagination spontaneously; I strove to grasp them: ere I could do so they died out for want of fuel. . . . The after-darkness was terrible.

In those days I had need of all the philosophy I could command. I fortified myself with the remembrance of men of highest genius who had trod the same hard and thorny paths, and who had learnt therein 'to regard evils not as what they seemed, but as what they were.' Men who had been tried in the refining fires of poverty and hardship, and who had come out therefrom pure and bright as gold comes from the furnace. I tried to realize the truths that 'every evil to which we do not succumb is a benefactor'—'an occasion and a teacher of resolution.' I found at length that the keen, bracing atmosphere of want and difficulty was invigorating. My views of life were expanded, my sympathies enlarged. I learnt to trust to myself rather than to others. The higher virtues acquired new meaning. Of these, Faith and Humility were most difficult to attain. In my ignorance I had imagined that I had attained them in some degree before; I found now that I had not even understood them. . . . Let no man be quite sure of himself, unless he has endured much cold and hunger.

CHAPTER III.

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE.

‘Not the sun
Looks out upon us more revivingly
In the earliest month of spring,
Then a friend’s countenance in such an hour.

COLERIDGE: *From the German of Schiller.*

At the beginning of the second week of November I received an order for a small sketch of the ruined Castle of Danesborough. It was to be paid for on completion: of course I determined to lose no time. On the Tuesday morning, as soon as the sun was fairly through the mist I set out for the Castle Hill.

It was a cold morning, but pleasant and exhilarating. Several people were walking about on the hill; and a little to my surprise, I saw that the one-armed sailor with his model ship was still sitting near the gateway. I had been in the habit of considering him as something connected with ‘the season.’

Presently I observed a gentleman cross the road and begin talking to him. The gentleman was tall, square-built, dark-bearded, and dressed in a suit of roughest blue pilot-cloth. I had not noticed these things but for the fact that his gait, and something peculiar in his position as he stood talking to the

sailor, reminded me of one who was rarely out of my thoughts for a whole hour.

I was close upon them now; near enough to see the outline of a noble, intellectual, much-bronzed face, and to catch the momentary glance of an expressive gray eye. He turned rapidly.

‘Hesildene!’

‘Cameron!’

It was my friend.

* * * * *

The one-armed sailor must have been a little surprised to see us stand looking at each other for several seconds without uttering another word: then Cameron put his arm through mine and we turned away.

‘What are you doing here, old fellow?’ he said; ‘and where have you got those hollow cheeks? You have been ill?’

‘No; not for a day.’

‘What were you going to do just now?’

‘Make a sketch of the castle.’

‘Never mind the sketch; come down with me to the Albion—I am staying there. I shall want to have a little talk with you, if you have no objection?’

‘None at all. What are you doing in Danesborough? I thought you were on the Continent.’

‘So I was till six weeks ago. I stayed one week in London with my mother and sister; and then came down with little Dyson to Port St. Hilda. I intend staying there till near Christmas. It is a capital place for a marine-painter; and I have two or three commissions. I came over here yesterday for the purpose of extending my acquaintance with the coast.’

‘How long are you going to stay here?’

‘Only till to-morrow. And now tell me something about yourself: you needn’t say much, for I think I can guess pretty nearly the true state of things. But wait awhile: we shall be at the Albion in a minute or two; and if you don’t mind joining me, I should like a second breakfast. The air up on that foreland is uncommonly sharp. I feel as hungry as a hunter.’

It was nearly three months since I had seen a proper meal properly set out on a table; and I am not ashamed to confess that the sight caused a swelling sensation in my throat. I had grown accustomed to see little Ruth creeping into my room with a cup of muddy coffee and some dry toast on a battered tray covered with a dingy cloth; and I had put away my fastidious notions, feeling assured that they would keep well, and that if I should ever require them for future use they would be forth-

coming. But I was not prepared for the sudden sight of comfort and luxury ; still less was I prepared for the wonderful effect of good food upon my half-starved, unstrung system.

During the meal Cameron contrived that the conversation should, as much as possible, partake of the nature of a monologue—he being the speaker. He talked of foregone events, regretting much that he had sent a certain letter to me from Brussels, and trusting that the disappointment which it must have caused me had not been very great. He spoke of my troubles with much sympathy; he had always done so; there was ever a fine and true tenderness in his friendship. I could never quite understand how it was possible for me to have inspired such a faithful and self-sacrificing devotion in a man like Brooke Cameron.

Our breakfast concluded, he surprised me a little by the information that he had, a few weeks previously—before leaving London—received a letter from Neston Hall. It was written by my father, who desired to know whether Mr. Brooke Cameron could favour him with any information concerning the whereabouts of myself—his son. Cameron had read the letter with surprise, and had immediately written a negative reply. ‘Of course,’ he said, ‘I conclude that there has been some misunderstanding between you. Tell me all

about it at once, Paul; and let me write off to the squire by to-day's post.'

To the first part of Cameron's request I acceded without hesitation. I related to him every detail of the disruption that had led to my sudden and secret departure from home. I did not spare myself. I unburthened my soul of the heavy weight of remorse that had lain upon it since that fatal evening. I confessed that I had spoken many bitter and hasty and ill-judged words; and I acknowledged that my father's accusations were—to a certain extent—just; but I could not yield to my friend's entreaty to be allowed to act as a mediator.

'Wait awhile, Cameron,' I said, 'let me do something to prove that I am not quite such a "cumberer of the ground" as my father believes me to be. There need be no hurry. You know how strangely indifferent to me he has always been; he cared ten times more for my wife than he has ever done for me. Not for an hour will he sleep less sound on my account. . . . Give me time. Let me gain a position for myself, then I will go back and ask for forgiveness with all humility. I cannot go now, he will say that I have been driven to do so because I could not bear hardship.'

'Paul, you are arguing against your own better feelings; and you know it.'

‘ I do know it, Cameron—I acknowledge that I do. There are times when it lies heavily upon my soul to remember that my father is an old man, and that he may die unknowing whether his only son is alive or dead ; but I cannot forget his reproaches—I cannot go back in nameless poverty. You may say that my pride is false, or morbid, or what you will ; but I feel as if I should despise myself if I were to trample it underfoot.’

‘ Have you read the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke lately ?’

‘ No, I know it by heart.’

‘ By rote, I should say.’

‘ Very well. By rote, if you will.’

* * * * *

‘ Paul, old fellow, you’re sadly out of tune.’

There was a touching, sorrowing tone in Cameron’s voice as he uttered these words, and a grave, tender look in his eyes that thrilled me through. He had strange power over me, but I think he never knew it—if he had, he would have urged his wish more perseveringly. I fear he thought it would be no use doing so. Perhaps my determination appeared to be more firmly grounded than it was in reality. I believe now that, in my secret heart, I should have been glad if he had broken down the outworks of

pride and obstinacy that I had dignified with the names of firmness and perseverance.

When Cameron spoke again, it was to inquire into the details of my plans. I told him all—told him how I had hitherto failed entirely as far as pecuniary matters went, but that I believed I was gaining ground in my work daily. I asked him if he would like to go and look at my sketches, and give me his opinion and advice. He consented readily.

As I have said, I was aware that I had made some progress; but I was by no means prepared for the hearty and genuine terms of approval in which Cameron spoke of some of my best efforts. Others he criticised and condemned unsparingly; but his most adverse criticisms were given gently, and were full of welcome hints.

When he had looked over my work he sat down on a chair near the window of my little painting-room: I sat down too. We neither of us spoke for some time.

Cameron broke the silence.

‘You did well to decide on being a painter, Paul,’ he said. ‘You have the right stuff in you, but you must stick to the sea. You are too old to waste time in experiments.’

‘I have wasted much already.’

‘So I perceive. . . . You spoke of a sketch of the Castle this morning. Is it a commission?’

‘Yes.’

‘Can you decline it?’

‘Yes, easily.’

‘Write a note, and do so at once, then.’

‘What plans are you devising now?’

‘Trust me, will you? and obey me. I am a dozen years your senior.’

I did obey him. I wrote the note, and laid it on the table.

‘That’s right; but I shall require a good deal more submission yet. I know you must be penniless, or nearly so—tell me whether you owe anything?’

‘Yes; I owe my landlady for a month’s lodging, and for several small articles in the way of food.’

‘Nothing else?’

‘Nothing whatever.’

‘Then just listen to me, Paul. If you are determined to carry out these mistaken views of yours, don’t you think you are bound to do so with all possible speed?’

‘Most certainly.’

‘Very well. Then you must also acknowledge that you will not be justified in refusing a helping hand when it is held out to you. Remember how long we have been friends, Paul—friends not only in name, but in heart and soul—and do not refuse me a friend’s privilege. If I had a younger brother who needed

help, no one knows better than you the pleasure it would give me to afford him what he needed. You are almost more than a brother to me. If I am anything to you, prove it now by letting me help you until you are through the worst time of your probation. Leave Danesborough at once, and go back with me to Port St. Hilda. As I have said, it is a capital place for studying the sea, and I shall be there at least six weeks longer. We can work together a good deal during that time, and I may be of use to you. You can't refuse, Paul.'

I could not. The thought of being so much with the friend whom I loved with a love 'passing the love of woman' would alone have decided me. The contrast between the life I had been living and the life he held out was strong. No, I could not refuse; but I determined that my acceptance of the generous offer should be conditional. I thanked my friend in very few words, and I told him that I would do all he wished gladly if he would let me consider whatever pecuniary assistance I might require as a loan. Finding that I would consent on no other terms, he agreed to this.

CHAPTER IV.

EBB AND FLOW.

'Ay, there are some good things in life, that fall not away with the rest.

And of all best things upon earth, I hold that a faithful friend is the best.

o o o o o

For never was any man yet, as I ween, be he whosoever he may,

That has known what a true friend is, Will, and wished that knowledge away.'

OWEN MEREDITH.

ON the evening of the following day I sat with Cameron and little Dyson over a cheerful fire in the tiny sitting-room of a lodging-house in Streonshalh Terrace, Port St. Hilda. Dyson was also an artist, and was lodging at the same place, sharing Cameron's sitting-room. Unfortunately, the house was a very small one; I could not be accommodated with permanent lodgings.

It was a pleasant evening. We talked of old times; of the winter we had spent at Rome five years before; of a certain love-story that had happened there, wherein little Dyson had been made to suffer what he still termed 'shameful treatment' at the hands of a rich English widow some fifteen years his senior. We talked of pictures and painters; we criticised

critics. Little Dyson attacked one whom he spoke of as a 'self-constituted authority.' Cameron took up his defence; spoke of him as 'one who had striven with all his might to do whatsoever his brain and hand found to do; who had held a guiding light for toilers on a dim, and too-often rugged path—one whose sermons on the text, "By their fruits ye shall know them," were alone sufficient to mark his footsteps on the sands of his time—footsteps that the tossings of the yeasty little wavelets of criticism would never efface.'

Later in the evening Dyson disappeared to dress for a party. He was in great demand for parties, Cameron told me. It was no wonder, for a pleasanter, merrier, more good-natured little fellow it would have been difficult to find.

Cameron and I were left alone. We had much to say to each other, and the remainder of the evening was soon gone. Before we parted for the night, Cameron alluded to the subject of the preceding morning: he could not rest, he said, without making one last effort to induce me to change my mind.

'Not with regard to the painting, Paul, I don't mean that,' he concluded: 'stick to the profession by all means; for, with such love for the work as yours, it is hardly possible that you should fail. But do let the Squire know where you are, and what you

are about: I can hardly quiet my own conscience in the matter. I feel strongly tempted to write in defiance of you.'

'Don't do that, Cameron: let me think it over to-night. I will tell you what I decide to do in the morning.'

I need not recount the particulars of the long struggle that I had with myself that night—long and severe it was, for the contending emotions were weighty and unyielding. Suffice it to say that I could not set aside my original plans entirely; but I effected a compromise. Once let me plant my feet firmly on the path I had chosen—a few weeks, or at the outside a few months, might do this—then, without waiting for success, I would write, or go to my father. I told this to Cameron on the following morning; he listened with the same grave, tender look of reproach that I had seen on his face the preceding day. He was not satisfied; neither was I.

Before the close of that week I found myself settled in a quaint seaboard lodging about a mile and a half distant from Port St. Hilda. Longscaur-Wyke was the name of the place. It was a barren, bleak-looking spot. Four or five fishermen's cottages were perched upon unsafe-looking shelves that jutted out from the side of the cliff. There was no garden,

'garth,' or cultivated patch of ground near any of these homesteads; neither was there any sign of tree or shrub within a considerable distance. At first this sterility struck me with a sense of dreariness; then I grew accustomed to it. As the days wore on I began to perceive that the scenery along this rugged part of the coast-line had strange and peculiar charms of its own.

First, and above all, there was the mighty, restless, ever-changing sea. From the windows of the little cottage where I had procured lodgings, I had a glorious view of the expanse of water that spread across the wide bay from point to point, and was bounded only by the horizon. The variations in the aspect of this scene were innumerable, and invaluable to one who was ambitious to excel in the rendering of effects of sea and sky. Mists and vapours tinted with the glowing colours of morn and eve. Approaching squalls visible in drifting, low-hanging skies, and broad, grandly-heaving waves. Storm scenes appalling in their might and majesty; black lowering clouds sweeping along the face of the heavens, darkening the torn sea and the boiling surf. Dreamy moonlight glittering over the 'watery floor' and the wreck-strewn beach. The curiously-shaped 'points' and 'nabs,' 'scaurs' and 'nesses' that jut out from the tall, irregular cliffs. The green, cultivated

uplands beyond. The commonplace little 'bits' of fisher-life that met my eye daily at the 'great fischar-towne' of Port St. Hilda; the putting-off to sea; the landing of the boats; the unloading of the fish; the mending of the nets. The cottages at Longscaur-Wyke, and their picturesque surroundings: the upturned boats, the broken oars, the nets, lines, and baskets that lay strewn in confusion on the rocky slope between the houses and the beach. All these things, and a thousand others of artistic character, daily stimulated me to increased effort.

Of the four or five cottages that stood on the side of the rugged cliff at Longscaur, only one had the advantage of being two stories in height: in this one I had obtained lodging on most moderate terms. I had two little rooms, both facing seaward, but, unfortunately, in neither of them was there a fireplace. I had arranged my painting materials in the smaller of the two—a tiny rough-looking place that had been used as a lumber-room.

Meggy Willett, my landlady, was the wife of a fisherman named George Willett. George had originally been a sailor, Meggy said, but he had never had any education, and knowing that in consequence of this he might remain at sea all his life, and never rise higher than 'man-afore-t'mast,' he had left the trading vessel in which he had sailed and taken to

the fishing-boat. (A 'mule' it was, a small fishing-vessel between a boat and a coble.) It belonged to her father, she said, and her father lived in the cottage just above. The nets belonged to her brother, who lived in the cottage at the foot of the rock. Since her husband had come home they had managed the boat amongst them without other help, and divided the profits as fairly as they could. George's share was smallest, of course: he had no capital either in the boat or the nets, but he hoped to be able to buy a couple of lines before long.

Certainly, if 'To be slow in words is a woman's only virtue,' my merry, rosy-cheeked, ready-tongued little landlady had yet to seek the first gem of which to compose her husband's crown. She never entered my room without having some wonderful story to relate of George's feats of strength or daring or agility, of some dreadful accident that had happened to one of her seven children, or of some unusual outburst of ill-feeling on the part of her brother's bad-tempered wife. But she never bored me; her plenitude of quaint humour prevented this, and her happy, cheerful temper and her unselfishness shone out in all she said and did. . . . Good, kind-hearted little Meggy Willett! I dare not hold you up as a pattern of domestic notability, a model of tidy, quiet, reticent womanhood; but you were an affectionate wife and

mother, although you did let your sturdy little year-old lad lie kicking all day long on the heap of mussel-shells at your door; and you were a never-to-be-forgotten landlady, although your ability as a cook might have been questioned daily by an epicure or a person of weak digestion.

It would be impossible for me to put into words the gratitude which I felt towards my friend, Brooke Cameron, during those days—gratitude for generous, delicately-offered assistance, for help in my work, guidance, hints, and criticisms (the latter very adverse sometimes, but very wholesome), and, above all, gratitude for the friendship, the love, that was to me as the very joy and crown of my divided life. I had hardly a thought that I could not share with him, not a regret for the past which he did not try to soothe and soften, and not a hope for the future which he did not strengthen or restrain according to his judgment of what was fitting and needful.

‘ Nor could I weary, heart or limb,
When mighty love would cleave in twain
The lading of a single pain,
And part it, giving half to him.’

And yet, notwithstanding that he was all this and more, far, far more to me, notwithstanding that I was thus upheld by his words of counsel and comfort,

there were times when feelings of weariness bowed my spirit terribly. It may be that physical causes tended to produce this effect, for the winter was severe, I was living at the lowest possible food-rate, my painting-room was cold and damp, and my labours were frequently extended till far beyond the hour of midnight. These things combined were not favourable to the regaining of the high-toned health which I believed to be necessary to my success, and at certain hours I was strangely weighted by incapacity, mental and physical, for work of any kind. There were times when I believe it would have been impossible for me to have written even the most commonplace letter.

I had suffered from the same sensations during my stay at Danesborough, but as far as I could recollect they had come over me at irregular intervals, and had varied much in their duration. I began to observe now that I was subject to periodical influence of some kind—whether atmospheric or otherwise, I was for a long time unable to say; but at last I was convinced, almost unmistakably, that my working powers were affected by the ebb and flow of the tide. I cannot explain how or why; I can only state that it was so. When the tide began to rise, when the waves were rushing in upon the beach, and when the wind was sweeping in wild gusts over the rocks, my spirits

became animated, my hopes buoyant, my strength increased, my mental faculties were excited, and my impulse to work rapidly and feverishly so strong as to be not always under perfect control; this continued till perhaps an hour or more after high-water. Then with the ebbing tide, with the change of temperature, with the dying wind, and with the hoarse, receding murmur of the waves, reaction came. I grew depressed. Work done at such times was worthless. It was in vain I struggled against what I termed 'a fanciful idea'—fanciful it might be, and probably was, to a certain extent; but I feel yet a strong conviction that there was a germ of truth in it.

During this time I was working mainly at a picture in oil which I had begun at Danesborough: it was an attempt to translate into colour some lines from Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner':

'Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!'

I was far from satisfied with it: it bore about the same resemblance to the picture which I had conceived in my imagination as a photograph from the work of a master colourist bears to the original. But for Cameron's entreaties I should have thrown it aside: I found afterwards that his advice had, as usual, been the result of far-seeing and correct judgment.

During the week before Christmas I had to work hard to complete my picture. Cameron had decided to take it up to London with him on Christmas Eve. He was very sanguine as to the sale of it.

Much to my satisfaction, he was not able to finish his commission within the time that he had originally allowed himself. He should be obliged to return home to spend Christmas with his mother and sister, he said, but he would come down to Yorkshire again early in January. Little Dyson and I remained behind, finding abundance of interest and amusement in noting the ancient Christmas-tide customs which still survive amongst the primitive natives of Port St. Hilda and its neighbourhood.

At the beginning of the first week in January I received a letter from my friend: to my great astonishment he had sold my scene from the 'Ancient Mariner' for the sum of eighty-five guineas. He had also obtained for me two commissions for pictures similar in size and price; the subjects were left to my own selection.

CHAPTER V.

A STORM.

' I dropped my pen, and listened to the wind
That sang of trees up-torn and vessels toss'd—
A midnight harmony.'

WORDSWORTH.

AFTER Cameron's return from London, I set to work with redoubled hope and energy. I had determined that when my commissions were finished I would go back to Neston Hall. The resolution brought a calmness and a peace of mind to which I had of late been a stranger.

About the middle of February little Dyson grew tired of the boisterous winds and waves of the north-eastern coast. He went up to London, taking one of my pictures with him. A few days later he sent me a cheque for ninety guineas. Much against Cameron's will, I now insisted upon returning every penny that I had received from him since the second week of November. The amount was not large.

Cameron's commissions were nearly completed. I began to think with regret of the approaching separation; but I remembered that it would probably not be for long. If I continued my career as an artist, it

was possible that we might meet more frequently than we had ever done before.

On the afternoon of the last Thursday in February, I stood on the cliff at Longscaur-Wyke, watching the movements of Joe Willett and his tame seagull. Joe and I were fast friends. I was teaching him to read; and had promised him a new shilling if he could say the whole of the multiplication table by the first of March, his fourteenth birthday. He had been making a good deal of progress lately. The weather had been so stormy that his grandfather's fishing-boat—the *Lady Jocelyn*—had not been out for nearly five weeks. It had been a hard time for Meggy Willett, and, as she often told me, it would have been a hungry time for the seven children if they had not had a lodger. But this hard time had been in favour of the little fisherlad's education.

The morning of the day of which I write had, like the preceding days, been wild and gray, and stormy; but shortly after noon the weather had cleared out, and old Jemmerson, Meggy Willett's father, had decided to take the boat off as soon as the sea went down a little. His son, Bob Jemmerson, and George Willett, had already gone over to Port St. Hilda—where the boat was moored—to prepare for sea.

Little Joe was waiting to go over with his grandfather.

Twilight was beginning to creep over sky and ocean. I was undecided whether to go indoors to my work or to go over with old Jemmerson and Joe to Port St. Hilda and surprise Cameron with my presence at Streonshalh Terrace. I had almost made up my mind to do the latter, when I saw Cameron himself coming over the green ridge at the top of the cliff. He was walking at a rapid pace I saw, as I turned to meet him. . . . His eye brightened as of old, and a warm, pleasant, winning smile was on his lips as our hands met in the firm clasp of friendship. A stranger might have thought that we had not met for years.

‘Just in time, I see!’ he exclaimed, as old Jemmerson came to his cottage-door and whistled for little Joe. ‘I have just seen Bob Jemmerson and George Willett on the quay; they said they were going off to-night, and I want very much to have a moonlight view of the town from the roads. I want you to come with me if you can. I know you will like it; but the sons were afraid that old Jemmerson would object to take two of us in the boat. I thought I would come over and try to persuade the old man to give way for once. It will be so jolly if we have a fine night.’

We went down together to the door of Jemmerson’s cottage. The old man was just ready to start, and I

saw at a glance that he was unwilling to be detained even for a moment. He listened to the request, which we put forth with our united eloquence, but he listened only to deny. The *Lady Jocelyn* was only a small boat, he said, and nothing would induce him to take two gentlemen on board. He would take one willingly, and it didn't matter to him which of us it might be.

Of course, Cameron went, and I walked over to the quay-side to see them go out. Darkness had settled over the quaint old roof-trees of the town; lights glimmered on both sides of the river; more boats were going out of harbour; the crews were shouting to other men on the pier. I shook hands once more with my friend—I watched him descend the ladder and step on board. The ropes were hauled in—the little craft began to move. I walked down the pier, trying to distinguish the figures as they glided away into gloom and darkness. I saw them tossing up and down as they crossed the harbour-bar. A momentary gleam from the smaller lighthouse fell across the boat; Cameron was sitting in the stern. Then all was darkness again—blank, chilling darkness, that could be felt.

I went back to my lodging with a dull, aching sensation clinging about my heart, that almost

amounted to pain. I attributed it to the foretaste of the parting between myself and my friend. . . . The remembrance of my lonely, broken life came over me. I thought of the bitter lot that had been mine; of the sorrow that had darkened my days; of the heavy, almost unbearable weight of suspense and uncertainty that tortured me in secret. I could have borne the bitterest knowledge, I believed—ay, even the bitterest of all! ‘Calm despair’ chilled me one moment, ‘wild unrest’ stirred me the next. I thought of happy homes made happier by loving hearts; of bright firesides made brighter by children’s faces. Were these things never to be mine?—never! never! Was I to sit in darkness and desolation watching others move to and fro in light and warmth all my life? Should I never be other than a wifeless husband? Would my one sweet child never again kneel at a mother’s knee—be clasped in a mother’s arms—kissed with a mother’s kiss? . . . My heart cried out with an exceeding bitter cry for answers to these wild, passionate questions.

I sat in my painting-room till nearly midnight, trying to forget myself and my sorrows in earnest work. My success was only partial; I could not quite stifle the inward plaining that disturbed me.

It was not a calm night; the wind had been driving along the coast in fitful gusts all the evening, and a

little before twelve o'clock a sharp shower of hail or sleet rattled on the roof of the little cottage. The wind increased at a rapid rate during the shower, and did not diminish in any perceptible degree afterwards. Between twelve and one I went out of doors for a few minutes. Dense murky clouds were scudding across the sky; no moon was visible, and I knew by the hoarse swelling sound of the waves that a heavy sea was running. But I refused to acknowledge any conscious feelings of concern for my friend. I had seen too many storms at Longscaur-Wyke to have much fear of the *Lady Jocelyn* riding out an ordinary gale. Besides, there were no signs that any other of the inmates of the cottages at Longscaur felt anxiety; no lights were in the windows of the rooms where the wives and mothers, daughters and sisters, of the toiling fishermen were sleeping. They were too much accustomed to the sound of storm and tempest to be moved to fear by a windy night.

I went back to my room, but I felt not the slightest inclination to go to bed, neither could I work at my painting; the subject—a wreck scene—was too suggestive. I took it from the easel and turned it towards the wall; and for some time I walked up and down the cheerless little place, listening to the wind, and living over again, in thought, some of the past years of my eventful life.

Then I sat down by the little table where my writing materials lay. Aimlessly, almost unconsciously, I took a pen in my hand, placed a sheet of paper before me, and began pouring out in broken, unstudied phrase the moanings of the deathless love that filled my heart. Without any preconceived design the words that came from my pen took the form of a letter to my lost wife. It might reach her at some time, I thought, when or how I did not stop to consider.

‘Claire, my wife, my own true wife!’ I wrote, ‘wherever you are to-night—and my brain is all but weary of the thousand dreamings and conjecturings that crowd upon me—but wherever you are, I think you must be sleeping with a sleep that is almost deathlike, for I feel as if your spirit, some subtle essence or emanation from your soul, had escaped from you and found its way to me. This feeling assures me that you have not forgotten me; that your love for me—the love that was so strong and true and tender once—is not yet dead; that whatever harsh or mistaken thought of me you may cherish, whatever resolutions you may have formed, you cannot entirely crush out of your heart the affection that four short years ago was the mainspring of every action of your life. You cannot do this, Claire.

“Love is eternal.
Whatever dies, that lives, I feel and know,
It is too great a thing to die.”

‘But if even it were possible for you to do so, possible for you to free yourself from every thought of me, and supposing that I knew you had done this, it would in no way change my changeless love for you. . . . Oh, my wife! my wife! my very own little wife! would that at this moment you could read but one page of the unwritten volumes of my thoughts of you! Would that you could know but for one short hour how I long for the sound of your voice, the touch of your gentle hand, to hear your step on the stair, and the soft rustle of your dress! Would that you might know how ceaselessly your tiny figure flits before me; how my fingers thrill to the touch of your soft brown hair, and how the sound of your twilight music haunts me night and day!—It was only last evening I walked alone on the cliff at Port St. Hilda. Someone was playing “La Femme du Marin.” It was quite dark, no one was near. I bowed my head on the iron railing in front of the house, and wept some scalding bitter tears. The days when you used to play that piece for me were the only happy days I have ever known.

‘Claire—my own Claire, the conviction that you are near to me grows stronger every moment. My

blood rushes wildly through my veins, my heart beats fast and out of time, my eyes burn, my brain throbs, and my imagination is roused to unwonted powers of vision. Again I see you tripping over the lawn at Neston in your light summer dresses, bending over your rose-bed, gathering your choicest flowers for Ann Meyrick's sick child. I see you sitting under the copper beech-tree, embroidering a little white frock for Denise; your taper fingers fly fast, and the plumes of your hat flutter in the summer breeze. Again, I sit on the ground at your feet, reading to you "The Idylls of the King": you shrug your tiny shoulders. "You know you are very stupid," you say, with a sweet, regretful smile, "but you can't like poetry—you can't indeed." For a moment I feel sorry when I hear you say this; but it is only for a moment. I look into your eyes, radiant with the love-light that fills your heart; I hold your little hand in mine, and touch it with my lips, and I feel that you are a living, breathing poem, full of such tender cadences, such thrilling harmonies, that books of printed words become voiceless and untuneful. . . . Oh, Claire, Claire, my little wife! Think of me now—think of me now!

More than this I wrote—ten times more; but the refrain was the same on every page. The keynote had been sounded for me: it went on ringing in my

ears above the stormy night-wind; I could not but write in unison.

Morning broke at last. Dark portentous-looking clouds were sweeping across the horizon, a thick gray mist shrouded the outline of Langscaur Nab, and the sea was running very high near the shore. I could no longer refuse to see that a heavy storm was approaching. I went out to the edge of the cliff. Meggy Willett was standing there with Bella Jemmer-son, her brother's wife, and two other women. They were discussing the appearance of the weather very calmly, but the face of each woman wore an expression of anxiety and misgiving.

During the time that I stood talking to them—a quarter of an hour or, perhaps, twenty minutes—some sudden and singular changes took place. The wind increased rapidly, the mist rolled away, the atmosphere became unusually clear, distant rarely-seen headlands stood out distinctly, the fishing-boats—five or six dark specks in the offing—became visible, a strange cold bleak aspect was on land and sea, the dark ocean outside the breakers rolled in large ridges, the heavy surf, seething and tossing along the shore, began to separate itself into huge white-crested mountains, seagulls came winging landward, flapping their white wings against the dark cliffs, and uttering shrill cries, and showers of the yellow yeasty spray

came flying round us with increased force every moment.

For a time the women were silent. Then one of them, a tall, sallow, girlish-looking person but lately married, began to cry. 'They'll niver get ower t' bar,' she said, with a sob.

'Oh yes, Janie,' said Meggy Willett, in a cheery tone; 'don't say that, woman. I've seen 'em come ower in a deal worse weather than this.'

'Let's goä doon as far as t' quay,' said Bella Jemmerson. 'Ah can niver rest indoors wi' t' sea makin' like that.'

'Ay, we'd better goä doon,' said an elderly woman, who had hitherto spoken but little, 'they maäy want a bit o' help when they land; but it strikes me 'at they'll niver try t' bar this moörnin. They're far mair likely to come ashoöre on t' lang sand.'

I went on to the town with the women. We had hardly reached the quay, when wild piercing shrieks were heard in the distance. Some tall, strong-looking fishermen dashed by, white and breathless, raising the cry of 'A coble capsized!' I reached the Scotch Head with the foremost of them. A second cry of 'All saved!' ran along the length of the pier in a few moments. The upturned boat was dashing about in the surf just outside the bar. The crew of three men had been rescued by ropes and life-belts thrown

from the piers. They were not the crew of the *Lady Jocelyn*.

Four cobbles were now plainly visible outside the breakers. The storm was increasing in violence every moment; but now and then mocking glimpses of cold, wintry sunlight broke out from between the dark, flying scud, lighting up the angry-looking sea, and making the ghastly faces of the fear-stricken watchers on the pier look ghastlier than ever. The pier was crowded by this time. Presently I observed a commotion amongst the people about the Scotch Head. They were getting out the lifeboat. She was launched in an incredibly short space of time; but as she went off the carriage she struck the beach somewhat heavily; two of the light-blue and white oars flew upward, glittered for a moment in the sun, and then were lost in the boiling surf.

Breathlessly the crowd watched the twelve brave men who composed the crew of the lifeboat making their way through the mountainous breakers that rolled between the beach and the four tiny boats outside. The distance was wide and perilous; the anxiety became intense. It seemed as if the waves were rising higher and higher every moment, forming deep troughs between, into which the lifeboat sank at times, remaining invisible for several seconds. These intervals were awful.

As the fishing-cobles came nearer, I began to try to distinguish the *Lady Jocelyn*, but they seemed to me all so much alike that I failed to do this. I turned to look for Meggy Willett. The little woman was standing tip-toe on the rim of a capstan, with her arm round Janie Croft, who was sobbing under her shawl, scarcely daring to look up even for a moment, and yet powerless to turn away. Meggy's face was tearless, but it was very white and stony.

'The *Lady Jocelyn* isn't i' sight yet,' she said, in answer to my question; 'not unlikely they've run in somewhere for shelter. That's the *Dolphin*, Sam Croft's coble—her wi' t' white stern.'

The boats were coming in stern foremost.

It had been plainly evident for some time that none of them were making for the bar; they came for the beach slowly and laboriously; and, as they neared the edge of the breakers, one after another they lowered their sails. There was still a wide distance between the lifeboat and the foremost of the fishing-cobles. Presently it occurred to me that the lifeboat could not take in the whole of the four crews from the smaller craft.

'What would she do?' I inquired of an ancient mariner who stood on the pier.

'All she can do is to stick by 'em, ready to help the furst 'at needs,' he replied.

After a time of painful suspense, the *Dolphin* shot into the outermost line of breakers, and became for a few seconds invisible. Then she rose again—a heavy sea struck her, and sent her bow up into the air, making her seem for a moment as if she stood perpendicularly on her stern. A low, suppressed murmur ran along the pier, and strong, stout-hearted men turned their backs on what they feared would be a repetition of scenes but too frequently witnessed. But the *Dolphin* came on, passing the lifeboat a little to the leeward, and again disappearing for a few moments in the trough of the sea. As she rose again a second tremendous wave struck her—it was partially spent, yet it sent her flying and shuddering forward at an awful rate, and nearly filled her with water. Yet she came on, rearing and tossing more and more fearfully as she neared the shore, and the white surf curling over her from stem to stern more densely with every succeeding wave.

By this time the three other cobsles had come in contact with the breakers. They came on in the same perilous manner—rising on the tops of the crested waves, shooting along into lakes of low, seething foam, disappearing into deep, wide valleys, and recovering themselves after heavy shocks in a manner that seemed almost miraculous. The lifeboat had turned—the crew were evidently trying

to keep her as nearly as possible equidistant from the four fishing-cobles. I began to wish much that the *Lady Jocelyn* had been one of the four.

The *Dolphin* was close in by this time. 'Come wi' me, Meggy, come,' Janie Croft said, with something between a sob and a cry of joy. 'Let's go an' help 'em to carry t' lines up. They'll be on t' sand afore we can get doon.'

'I pray God you be not mistaken,' said a grave, kindly-looking old gentleman as the women turned away.

His prayer was heard; Janie had not been mistaken. As she and Meggy Willett reached the sand, one more huge breaker struck the bow of the *Dolphin*, and she came heavily on the beach. The poor toil-worn crew leaped out long before she was fairly on dry land. A dozen of the sailors and fishermen who stood on the sand dashed into the water up to their armpits, seized the stern of the boat, and dragged her up. A few minutes later the second boat came in, in a similar manner; then the third, passing close to the capsized boat, which was still drifting about in the waves. Only one more coble and the lifeboat remained behind. Their deliverance ten minutes later was yet more miraculous, for a heavy shower of sleet had come on. Everything was obscured; the wind raged more violently, lashing the waves into

more awful fury than I had ever before witnessed, and increasing the wild, deafening roar of the storm to a pitch that no words can describe. As soon as the lifeboat and the last of the four fishing-cobles were landed, the crowd began to disperse. There was another boat wanting, but she might have run for Danesborough, or, yet more likely, for Robin Hood's Bay.

A few people still remained on the pier; amongst them I observed one of the coastguard leaning against the parapet, and scanning the horizon with a glass. Suddenly, as the shower began to clear away, he, with three others, disappeared, leaving behind them the news that the missing boat was in the offing. The men who had left the pier went down to the sands. A few minutes more and the lifeboat was again tossing in the surf.

Long before the atmosphere was perfectly clear again I saw in the distance the small, dark speck which I knew to be the *Lady Jocelyn*. She seemed to be coming in at a much more rapid rate than the others had done. As she came nearer I saw that she was drifting in helplessly. Her oars were gone, all but one—this one oar, with a red handkerchief tied to it, was held up in the middle of the boat by one of the men.

She came yet nearer, skimming like a bird over the

dark, torn, boiling sea; but there was still a wide distance between her and the lifeboat. She dashed impetuously into the surf. The first breaker sent her round with her head towards the pier; the second, a towering, crested, sweeping mass of water, struck her heavily on her broadside. . . . Through the white, flying surge I saw for one instant the black upturned keel of the little boat—the five dark figures tossing in the foam.

* * * * *

CHAPTER VI.

A CHANGE.

‘Calm on the seas, and silver sleep,
And waves that sway themselves in rest,
And dead calm in that noble breast
That heaves but with the heaving deep.’

TENNYSON: *In Memoriam*.

I CANNOT write of my sorrow, of the hours that I sat as one stunned by a terrible blow—stunned yet fully conscious. From the very first hour I realized *all*—all that I had seen, and all that I had lost: the agony of the present pain, and the dull dread of days to be. The wind went on roaring round the little cottage; the rain beat wildly upon the roof and

against the windows. Meggy Willett sat sobbing and rocking herself to and fro by the fire ; the children moved about with tear-stained faces ; sympathizing neighbours came in and out. The day wore into evening, the evening into night. The storm subsided. The boat washed up, so did the oar with the red handkerchief tied to it. They were found on the sands at daybreak next morning. An hour or two later the bodies of Robert Jemmerson and little Joe Willett were found : the three others lie waiting till that day wherein the sea shall give up her dead.

The morning was, comparatively speaking, calm. The sky was gray and cold and cloudy ; the wind rose and sank wailingly ; the sea heaved in low wide undulations, and the waves broke on the shore with a sad, disconsolate murmur that seemed full of sympathy. Yet it was terrible to watch them, to see them rolling on, on, on—for ever on over that spot to which my eyes were drawn as if by an irresistible force. . . . I can see it now as plainly as I saw it then : I see it sleeping and waking ; never without a longing, comforting thought of that Peaceful Land where ‘ there shall be no more sea.’

‘ Yet less of sorrow lives in me
For days of happy commune dead ;
Less yearning for the friendship fled,
Than some strong bond which is to be.’

I had no 'last words' to comfort me; but his last wish, the wish that it had pained me to refuse during his life, I hastened to honour in the midst of my sore grief for his death. The remembrance that I had denied him this one desire stung me bitterly.

But before I could return to my father, I had a painful duty to perform for my friend—that of taking the terrible news to his mother and sister. I should have started on this sad errand the evening before, but for the hope that I could have taken with me the news that his body had been found. I could not wait longer than the noon of the following day; they might hear of what had happened from others. Noontide came. The watchers on the pier had watched in vain. I left Port St. Hilda for London at one o'clock, intending to return to Neston-on-the-Wolds the following day.

I need not recount the details of the distressing interview between Mrs. and Miss Cameron and myself. For some minutes the elder lady evidently failed to grasp the full meaning of the terrible truth; when she did realize it, her efforts to control her grief were painful to witness. I would have shortened my visit, thinking that the stricken mother and sister might prefer being alone in such an hour as that; but they both of them begged me to remain. I did so: I stayed with them for some hours. It might

be that my own keen sorrow—so nearly akin to theirs—enabled me to offer sympathy more readily, if not more truly, than I could otherwise have done.

I left London for York on the afternoon of the same day—Saturday—intending to return to Neston Hall that evening, remain for a few days, and then go back to Port St. Hilda for my unfinished picture and other small possessions that I had left behind. There were also some paintings and other things belonging to my friend, to be carefully packed and sent to London.

The future that was before me—a future to which I had ever turned with steady hope—was darkened now. I thought I could never again look forward with strong desire to anything. What would it matter now whether I achieved success or not? Supposing I attained the highest—supposing that honour, and fame, and wealth were showered upon me—how could I, a friendless, wifeless, isolated being, ever care for such things as these?

Then I reproached myself for having yielded to these low, selfish repinings. Had I no wider, purer aims than worldly success or friendly appreciation? Were these the limits of my desires? Had I already forgotten the creed which my friend had held so firmly—a creed that has been put into words by

'singing lips' that are now, like his, silent for ever?—

'Fame itself,
The approbation of the general race,
Presents a poor end (though the arrow speed,
Shot straight with vigorous finger to the white),
And the highest fame was never reached except
By what was aimed above it. Art for art,
And good for God Himself, the essential Good!

Surely I must have mistaken my vocation if my efforts could become one degree less earnest, my aspirations one degree lower, because a cloud had fallen across my pathway! The cloud was a heavy one, but an upward-looking eye might in time, perhaps, come to behold the silver lining.

It was some time between six and seven o'clock in the evening when I arrived at York. I had a short time to wait. The lamps were lit in the busy station. I sauntered along mechanically towards the bookstall: just before I reached it I caught sight of the stately, dark-eyed woman whom I had seen on the promenade at Danesborough. At the same moment her eye met mine. Pale, hesitant, and tremulous, she came up to me.

'Mr. Paul Hesildene,' she said in a hoarse, hurried voice, 'you may take me now; put me in prison—do

the worst you can do to me! If you will come with me, I will tell you all.'

'Who are you?' I inquired.

My companion did not speak. Her lips were ashy gray and firmly compressed, and her large, beautiful eyes were full of pain.

We walked along the station together: at the door of the Station Hotel she stopped.

'Will you go in and ask for a private room?' she said. 'I have much to say. I cannot tell you all I have to tell here amongst the crowd.'

I obeyed her suggestion, wondering much who this strange woman could be. She was still in deep mourning and well dressed; her bearing was perfect; she spoke good if not refined English, and, as far as I had been able to detect hitherto, without any recognisable provincial accent.

In a few minutes we were alone in a small, brilliantly-lighted room. My companion stood, white and speechless, with her eyes fixed upon the floor. Her head was slightly thrown back, her figure erect, and she rested one hand on the edge of the table.

I asked her to be seated, but she appeared as if she did not hear me. Then I placed a chair for her and another for myself. Still she remained standing, still speechless, and so deadly white that I feared she would faint.

Presently, however, she seemed to recover: she raised her eyes from the carpet, fixed them full on my face, and with much apparent difficulty began to speak. Her voice was still tremulous, and now and then she stopped suddenly, as if some pain or spasm prevented her words.

‘You asked me just now who I am,’ she began. ‘My name is Helen Grant. Have you no recollection of me?’

‘Very little. I remember seeing you at Danesborough, of course, and I must have seen you somewhere previously, but I cannot tell where—at least, I cannot be certain.’

She hesitated, and appeared to be considering something; then she said, as if thinking aloud:

‘No, it is not surprising; I only saw you twice—you would not notice me, I dare say. But that is nothing to the purpose,’ she said, rousing herself as if by a desperate effort, and clasping her hands nervously together. ‘I must tell you—I will tell you at once. I was Lady Trenholm’s maid—I lived at Trenholm Park for some time. It was I who added the date to the note that fell into Mrs. Hesildene’s hands and drove her from home. I wish my fingers had been powerless when I did it! I have never had a happy day since. Punish me just as you will—just as you will: I cannot be more miserable than I have been.’

It was my turn now to be speechless. If my heart had not been softened by recent sorrow, I think I should have found it very hard to forgive the woman before me.

‘What was your motive for such a cruel deed?’ I inquired as gently as I could.

‘Will you listen to me if I tell you all?’ Helen Grant said in a sad, subdued tone. ‘I don’t want to make any excuses for myself, but I should like you to know the truth—I should like you to know that I never meant to injure you—or Mrs. Hesildene.’

‘Mrs. Hesildene! do you know anything of her? I mean, have you ever seen or heard of her since she left Neston Hall?’

‘I will tell you all I know if you will hear me patiently to the end.’

‘Yes, yes; only come to the end as quickly as you can.’

‘I will. . . . You knew Mr. Guy Trenholm; *Sir* Guy he is now; you imagined you knew him well, I dare say; but you could not have done that, for if you had known his baseness you would never have made a friend of him. Base as he was, I loved him—loved him passionately; loved him as much as I hate him now. I have read in books that the deepest love makes the deepest hate; that’s true—as true a saying as ever was written.

‘Perhaps you will blame me for loving a man so far above me; but you wouldn’t blame me if you knew all; if you knew how he had tried to make me love him; how he had sworn passionately a thousand times that I and no other should be his wife. Idiot that I was, I believed him; I never doubted that the day would come when I should be Lady Trenholm. I had heard of stranger things than that. I was good-looking then—not the wreck I am now: handsome, he said I was; so did other people, for the matter of that. But I did not rest content with my good looks. I tried to educate myself; I watched the ways and listened to the words of people who were better born. Guy laughed at me for this; he said I was fit company for the best of them any day.

‘It was not until the last time but one that we went abroad that I had any reason to suspect Guy Trenholm of falsehood. It was reported that his cousin, Miss Trenholm, was engaged to an Italian count. For weeks and weeks everybody said that Mr. Guy was moody and stupid, and that it was because of his cousin’s engagement. I did not believe this; he was the same to me as ever. But after awhile the count began to fail in his attentions to Miss Trenholm; he transferred them to another English lady, who was much richer. Augusta Trenholm never was like herself after that. Mrs. Estridge, her maid,

said she was so cross and bitter that she should give her warning and leave her as soon as we got back to England ; but she thought better of that. It was a good place.

‘ People said now that Mr. Guy was bright and cheerful again ; and Mrs. Estridge told me that Miss Trenholm had accepted him in a fit of vexation. I felt uneasy ; but still I did not believe it—not for a moment. They did not treat each other in the least like people who were engaged to be married, and Mr. Guy was still the same to me. When I asked him if there was any truth in what I had heard, he only laughed at me, and called me silly and jealous.

‘ But before six more months were over I found that Mrs. Estridge had been right. The engagement was kept secret by Miss Trenholm’s wish. She hoped to go to Italy again the following winter ; and doubtless she thought it probable that Count della Lano might again have changed his mind.

‘ During the early part of that summer after we came back to England—the summer before I did that horrid deed—I was very unhappy. Mr. Guy was still kind to me ; but there was a difference in his kindness—a difference I cannot make you understand. I could not understand it myself then ; I see it all plainly now : he was trying to break with me gradually ; to do it without paining me ; or what

would have been worse still, offending me. I dare say he guessed that I shouldn't be a very desirable enemy.

'He was not happy, either ; I saw that, although I could not at first make out the cause of his unhappiness. As the summer went on I learnt that it was because of Miss Trenholm. She was colder and stranger to him than ever ; and people said that she was all smiles and graciousness to you.

'I did not see these things for myself. Lady Trenholm used to keep me sewing in her own room as much as possible ; but Mrs. Estridge saw them, and Mrs. Estridge was a clever woman—clever enough to understand her mistress ; and that is saying a great deal for her.

'One day when she was talking about Miss Trenholm, she told me that you had once made her an offer ; and that, although she had liked you—cared more for you than she had ever done for Mr. Guy—she had refused you because the Squire had just mortgaged all his property. Then the Squire got turned round, Mrs. Estridge said ; but you had gone abroad. When you came back you brought a wife with you ; and Augusta Trenholm hated your wife—hated her from the very first, even when she pretended to be all friendliness.

'But I cared nothing to hear of all this ; when she

talked of Mr. Guy I liked to hear her talk by the hour together, even though the things she said vexed me, and made me jealous to madness.

‘About the middle of the summer, Mrs. Estridge went away for her holiday, and I had to dress Miss Trenholm, and attend to her wardrobe. One day a bill was sent to her that she was sure she had paid, and she told me to look amongst her things for the receipted bill ; in doing this I found a note written by you ; it was lying at the bottom of a deep drawer, under her winter shawls and furs. I read it, put it back again, and for a time forgot all about it.

‘Then Mrs. Estridge came back, and things went on as usual for a week or two, till one morning Lady Trenholm told me, as a great secret, that her son and Miss Trenholm were engaged—that they were going to be married before long. I could doubt no more. I was wild with rage ; not only because he had told me falsehoods—not only because he had amused himself by flirting with me, and trying to make me believe that he cared for me—but because I loved him—loved him truly and well. There had been times during that summer when I had wished that he might fall into poverty, or disgrace, or trouble of some kind, so that I might have proved that I cared for himself, and not for his wealth or position. But that was all gone. I *did* suffer at first—more

than I can tell you ; but I was proud, and neither he nor anyone else could have guessed that I cared.

‘His manner to me was changed by this time—he seemed to think that I had forgotten all the past, that I was contented with things as they were. When he met me in the house, or about the grounds, he spoke to me just as he did to the other servants—half roughly, half familiarly—never kindly or tenderly, as he had done before. This, together with the fact that he and Miss Trenholm were on better terms with each other, enraged me more and more : I began to hate him—and before long I hated him with a hate that was as deep as ever my love had been.

‘Then I began to think of revenge—of doing something to cause a quarrel between them. For a long time I was at a loss, I couldn’t hit upon anything that I could carry out without help, till one day I remembered the note that I had seen with your name to it. That same evening, while Miss Trenholm was at dinner, I took it out of the drawer in her room, added the date to it, and dropped it in the park, by the side of the path leading down to the kennels. I knew that Mr. Guy Trenholm was in the habit of going down there early every morning.

‘I have told you the worst now. I don’t want to say one word for myself ; but I want you to believe that I never dreamed of harming you. Indeed, I was so

mad and blind with hatred that I never thought of you at all.

‘When I knew the result of what I had done, I was horror-stricken. I would have confessed then, if I had dared, but I knew that if I did I should be turned away without a character, and I had no home to go to.

‘Much to my surprise, I found that Lady Trenholm suspected that I had had something to do with the wicked deed; and one day she openly accused me of being concerned in it one way or another. I denied all knowledge of it. I hated myself more for the falsehood than I had done for the deed itself.

‘Be patient with me a few minutes longer. I have nearly done—I will hurry over the rest of what I have to say. . . . I remained with Lady Trenholm till she died; afterwards I was out of place for some time; then I came to Mrs. Shortwood’s, of Albert Villa, on the Priory Road. I was with her at Danesborough last autumn. I saw you there and wrote a note, which I gave to you on the evening of the last day but one before we came away. I intended to make this confession to you then, but my courage failed me.

‘One day about two months ago, a wet stormy day it was, I had to come into York to take a cab and go to Miss Appleby’s school for Miss Shortwood and Miss Alesia. As I drove up to the door a lady was

coming out into the rain. She looked worn and ill, and she was shabbily dressed, but I recognised her immediately. It was Mrs. Hesildene.

‘That night as I was undressing Miss Alesia I described to her the lady I had seen coming out of the school, and inquired her name. Miss Alesia said it would be Madame Foudrinier, the French teacher.’

‘Stop!’ I exclaimed impatiently; ‘before you utter one word more of other things, tell me whether Mrs. Hesildene is in York now?’

‘She is. She lodges in a street not far from the station. I have said all I have to say. I will go with you and repeat it all to Mrs. Hesildene if you desire it. I would have gone to her before if I had dared. I meant to do so. I have passed the house where she lodges dozens of times during the two months that I have known of her being here: but I could never summon courage to go in. If I had ever met her as I met you to-night, perhaps I should not have been so cowardly.’

Helen Grant had finished her story. She had spoken plainly and intelligibly; I had comprehended all she had said, and yet I felt as if bewildered; as if the sudden flood of light, the shining, radiant ‘Light of Hope’ had dazzled me with its brightness. I tried

to think, to realize the import of what I had heard. In vain. I was conscious of nothing but trembling bliss and deep wordless gratitude.

CHAPTER VII.

FORETELLS SETTLED WEATHER.

'Ah! but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,
And they are rich and ransom all ill-deeds.'

SHAKESPEARE : Sonnet xxxiv.

ABOUT five minutes' walk from the station brought us to the narrow street and the tiny house which Helen Grant pointed out as the place where Mrs. Hesildene lodged. I lifted the knocker with a trembling hand, and listened with a beating heart for the long-delayed footstep. Thoughts, hopes, fears, crowded through my brain rapidly : mixed up with all was pity for the woman who stood by me silent and stately as a carven image.

Presently the door was opened.

'Is Mrs. Hesildene at home?' I asked of the gray-haired widow who stood in the passage.

'I don't know nobody o' that name, sir.'

'I believe Madame Foudrinier lodges here?' said Helen Grant.

'She does,' replied the widow laconically.

'Is she within?' I asked, inwardly groaning over my stupidity.

'She is.'

'Can I see her?'

'That depends. Who may you be, sir? But you'd better come in. It's noän such a warm night. Come in here, into t' parlour.'

We accepted the invitation, Helen Grant and I. There was a cheerful fire and a cheerful lamp in the little parlour. I bade Helen sit down; then I asked the widow if I could speak to her alone.

'Yes,' she replied, 'if you doän't mind comin' into t' kitchen. There's nobody there.'

I followed her into the kitchen. She seemed much surprised, but I did not keep her long in suspense.

'Is Madame Foudrinier upstairs?' I asked.

'Yes, sir.'

'Is she alone?'

'She is. She's been out teachin' all t' day, an' she's tired, as she mostly is; but if you want to see her about lessons, I'll tell her.'

'But I don't want to see her about lessons. I am an old friend, and I have brought her good news. Will you let me go up to her without being introduced?'

'I daren't do that. She'd not take it well, sir; I'm sure she wouldn't.'

'I will undertake to make that right. Do trust me: you will not regret it.'

'You have brought her good news, you say?'

'I have: the best of news.'

'Well, she needs it sore enough; a more down-hearted lady I never saw. I've allus thought 'at she hadn't a friend in the world.'

'Will you show me which is the door of her room?'

The widow hesitated—looked into my face.

'Yes,' she said; 'an' if you've told me anything 'at isn't true, I'll never trust nobody no more as long as I live.'

As I followed her up the tiny staircase my heart throbbed wildly. I had hard work to keep down a trembling dread that my cup of happiness might yet be dashed untasted from my lips.

When we reached the landing the widow bent toward me, and whispered:

'You'd better let me knock an' open the door for you.'

'Very well,' I replied.

A minute later I stood alone in the same room with my wife. Three years and a half had passed since we parted; we were both altered, but we recognised each other instantaneously. She had been sitting on a low chair; she rose as I entered the room—a pale, thin shadow of her former self. She turned

still paler, trembled visibly, tried to collect herself—to look dignified, reproachful, unyielding. She failed in all; began to sob hysterically, and then burst into passionate tears. But for a strong arm she would have fallen.

* * * * *

‘And what of my little Denise?’ were her first coherent words.

In reply I gave her a hurried *résumé* of my rough winter.

Then there was another silence. I began to wonder what my Claire’s thoughts were—whether she was trying to think the best of me, to find excuses for me, intending to ‘let the dead past bury its dead,’ or whether the evidence of Helen Grant was needed to complete her happiness.

‘Claire,’ I said, ‘I am wondering whether you forgive me.’

For a moment or two she did not speak. My arm was round her; she moved uneasily; then she turned her wan, wistful little face up to mine, and I saw that the tears were again gathering in her eyes.

‘Forgive you? Yes, yes—a thousand times!’ she said impetuously. ‘You could not have come to ask me if you had felt yourself unworthy. . . . Forgive me, Paul—forgive me.’

Then I told her the strange story that I had heard,

and once more my little wife bowed her head and wept. She should never forgive herself, she said—never.

‘Will you see Helen Grant?’ I asked. ‘She came with me: she is in the little parlour below.’

‘No, no, Paul; certainly not. Do you think I cannot trust your word?’

‘I was not thinking of that, my darling; but she seems as if she were still suffering, and I thought you might say something to comfort her—to set her mind at rest, as far as we are concerned, before we send her away.’

‘Poor thing!’ murmured my kind-hearted little wife. ‘Yes; we had better tell her that we quite forgive her. . . . She is in the parlour, you say; may I go down and see her alone?’

‘Certainly, dear, if you wish it; but don’t stay long: we have much to do. Will you send your landlady up to me when you go down?’

‘Why, Paul?’

‘Because I am going to take you back to Neston to-night.’

‘Oh no! not to-night—I cannot go to-night.’

‘Oh yes, you can, dear! I will arrange things. We have plenty of time to catch the last train.’

‘But my pupils?’

‘We will write notes to the pupils, and I will come over for your luggage next week.’

‘Oh, Paul, Paul! I don’t deserve so much happiness—I don’t, indeed! Oh, I dare not think that I shall see my little Denise again to-night!’

‘Then don’t think of it, dearest, but go and say something kind to the poor creature downstairs, and then come back to me. Tell her not to go till I have seen her again.’

The hour that followed was a very busy one. Helen Grant went away forgiven, and, I trust, comforted. My wife and I said everything we could think of to soothe and cheer her, and she seemed surprised and grateful; but I did not feel that we were very successful in our attempts to soften her proud sorrow.

Then we had the notes to write, the much-bewildered landlady to enlighten, and some preparations in the way of packing to attend to. At last all was done. My little Claire came down dressed in a waterproof cloak and a black hat. We said good-bye to the widow, and presently found ourselves in the station. Twenty minutes we had to wait before the train for Market-Studley was due.

I have given but the faintest outline of the meeting between myself and my long-lost darling wife. Of the inner joy—the unspeakable, indescribable happiness vouchsafed to us both—I can say but little.

My own joy was like that of the mariner who comes safely into port after sailing stormy seas, with torn sails, shattered spars, 'and only not a wreck.' All the fears and doubts and despairs of the past were forgotten. Calm deep gratitude filled my heart. Only one thing was wanting—the presence of my friend. . . . Those were strange hours—intense absorbing bliss, truest thankfulness, full content and satisfaction, bright sunny hope for the future, and, underlying all, a cold heartache. I did not cloud my little wife's felicity with the knowledge of this till long, long afterwards—not until I could think and talk of *him* with the hope and serenity of mind that he himself would have been the first to teach me.

Claire trembled, and was silent. Her happiness, like mine, was too deep for words. When she spoke again it was to confess, with touching heart-deep humility, her impulsiveness, her want of faith in me, and the pride that had kept her from indulging her wish to return, or in any way seek for an explanation.

'But you *will* forgive me, Paul, will you not?' she entreated. 'I think I can never again be what I was before. I must have learnt something from the things I have suffered.'

We were seated in the train. Much to our satisfaction, we were alone. Claire was leaning her head

upon my shoulder, and both her tiny hands were clasped in mine. After I had once more tried to soothe her, to assure her that the long dark time was already beginning to fade rapidly, I laid upon her my command that the word 'forgiveness' should never be mentioned between us again.

'And now, my little Claire,' I said, 'I want to hear something of yourself. Remember, you have told me nothing yet. You acknowledge that you have suffered; no one could look at you and doubt that. You must tell me all about it, my darling—do not spare me.'

'Paul, I cannot tell you. It has been too terrible.'

'What is it that has been so terrible, petite?'

'Everything. Being away from you, and parting with Denise, and being very poor, and having to work when I was very ill and very tired, and not having anybody to say one kind word to me. Oh, Paul, Paul! don't ask me to go through it all again.'

'No, no, my little one! Not one word of all that unless you like; but tell me the outsides of things. Have you ever been out of England?'

'No, dear; not for a day.'

'Do you mind telling me where you have been?'

'No, not at all. Oh, how I wish I had been somewhere where you could have found me! but at first

I did all I could to prevent that. I went to the most unlikely place I could think of. I went to Worcester that evening after I left Neston Hall.'

'To Worcester? But you took tickets for London!'

'Yes, and I was sure you would find out that I had done that, so I took fresh tickets when I got to York—one for myself to Worcester, and one for Mrs. Mackelthwaite to go back to her friends in Cumberland: and I had to give her half of the money that I had, and some of the things out of my dressing-case to repay her for the clothes that she had left at Neston.'

'And you and baby went on?'

'Yes. It was quite late in the evening when we got to Worcester. I went to a hotel near the cathedral first, and next day to a small lodging. I cannot tell you anything about all those days of misery. I grew very poor before I could get any work to do. Then I left Denise with the woman who kept the lodging-house, and I went to live as French governess at a boarding-school a few miles out of Worcester. I only saw my baby about once a month; and I didn't think the woman was very kind to her, and it was killing me; so I gave up the situation at the school, and came back to York. I wanted to be near Neston. I was ill then—so ill that I thought I might die—and

I wanted to find someone whom I could trust to bring Denise to you when I was dead. I thought I might meet with someone I knew in York.'

'Oh, Claire, Claire! why couldn't you come back to me then?'

'I don't know, Paul—I don't know. You can't tell what it is to be dreadfully proud. It's like something that is stronger than yourself, and won't let you do what you want to do.'

'Perhaps I know more about it than you think, my darling—but finish your story; let me hear the worst.'

'Oh, I have nothing to tell that is *very* much worse, dear. I grew stronger when I had been in York a little while; and I had a kind old landlady, who was *so* good to Denise. I gave lessons in French, but I did not get many pupils at first; and I could not pay good old Mrs. Crosby for all she did for my baby; but she never seemed to care—she never asked me for money. But, before I had been in York very long, she went somewhere into the dales to live with her son. Then it was that I took Denise home. Oh, Paul, Paul! it *was* dreadful to have to do that. It seemed to me then that what I suffered during the week that followed was punishment enough for all I had done.'

'Did you take her to Neston yourself?'

‘Yes, dear.’

‘And did you go back to York that night?’

‘No; it was too late. I stayed with old Miss Ellingside, of Market-Studley, all night. She promised not to betray me; and from time to time she has sent me word about Denise. She knows Mr. Stanbrook, and she inquires of him, in a careless sort of way, how the little girl at Neston Hall is getting on, and then she tells me. But it is more than a month now since I heard from her, and her last letter was a very cross one. She has never spared me. Oh, how glad she will be now!’

‘And did you never mean to come back to me, Claire?’

‘I don’t know what I should have done. I have been more dreadfully unhappy lately than ever I was at the beginning. After I had parted with Denise I used to think that I would keep away from her until she was grown up, and married, and had a home of her own, and then I thought I would go and live with her; but when I heard from Miss Ellingside how you were still seeking me, I was wretched; I was sure then that there had been some mistake, or that you were sorry, and wanted to tell me so. If I had ever known when you were at Neston, I think I could have come back. I had all but decided to do so when I heard that you had gone away without telling any-

one where you were going. I have been very sad since then, Paul—very sad.'

'But you will soon forget it all, my little one. A time of sorrow like that fades out very quickly—much more quickly than a time of joy.'

It was late when we arrived at Neston Hall. Mrs. Meyrick, at the lodge, failed lamentably in her attempt to utter some words of welcome; Sherrard wisely refrained from making any such attempt. Denise had gone to bed. My father was sitting alone in the library. I sent Sherrard in to prepare him for our return—to ask him if he would see us.

My father came out to us. He kissed my pale, trembling little wife tenderly, and he grasped my hand as he had never grasped it before.

'God bless you, my children!' he said—'God bless you!' Nothing more he uttered; but I saw that tears were dropping slowly over his worn face.

EPILOGUE.

'If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue; yet to good wine they do use good bushes, and good plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues. What a case am I in then, that am neither a good epilogue nor cannot insinuate with you in the behalf of a good play!'—SHAKESPEARE: *Epilogue to 'As You Like It.'*

I FINISH my story on a bright May morning. It is nearly three months since the events related in my last chapter took place.

My father is sitting on the lawn, under the copper-beech tree; Claire is reading the *Times* to him; Denise is hard at work on a square yard of ground known throughout the establishment as 'my darden.' I can see them all from the window of the room in which I write.

I have been intending to devote many pages to the expression of my great happiness; but words fail me. My father's kindness, his undoubted affection for me, seem to increase every day. The wonderful improvement in my little wife—her softened spirit, her self-control; the return of her health, her happiness, her brightness, her beauty, are all so many additions to my full cup of joy. The long, dark past is as if it had never been. Looking at it on its darkest side, it does but seem as a shadow thrown into a picture to enhance the brilliancy of the bright high light.

The happiness of the first year after our marriage was slight compared with this.

When we first returned to Neston, my little Claire was somewhat apprehensive concerning the kind of reception we should meet with from some of our neighbours. She has since smiled at her fears. Only once have we had to endure a *sympathizing* visit.

About six weeks ago we went down to Port St. Hilda for a few days. Meggy Willett has turned fishwoman. She is very hopeful as to her success when the herring season sets in.

I brought my unfinished picture back with me; and I am still working at it; but my work is of a very different kind from that done in the days of strife, confusion of soul, depression, and poverty. I am a firm believer in the fact that—

‘What you do

For bread, will taste of common grain, not grapes,
Although you have a vineyard in Champagne.’

Nevertheless, I do not in any wise regret the roughness of my rough winter. I feel now as if my previous knowledge of human life and its meanings had only been *half* knowledge—as if I had only looked at things from one point of view, and that not the point from which the highest or the widest glimpses of truth are to be obtained.

With good Bishop Taylor I have come to acknow-

ledge that 'when a storm of sad mischance beats upon our spirits . . . if it does any good to our souls it hath made more than sufficient recompense for all the temporal affliction.'

THORPE-HOUE FARM.

“ A woman’s heart takes a lang time o’ breaking.”

“ That’s according to the stuff they are made o’, sir.”

Heart of Midlothian.

CHAPTER I.

LIZZIE DENT.

‘ THERE’LL be no goin’ out this mornin’, Miss West, so I should advise you to stay in bed for another hour or two: it’ll rest you after your long walk yesterday.’

‘ Does it rain?’ I asked.

‘ Rain! yes; like a flood; an’ t’ hay’s all doon both i’ t’ home meadows an’ on t’ Broo-side. Isaac’s quite in a way about it. But it’ll be clearin’ up soon, I’ve been tellin’ him. T’ sky’s breakin’ away over Barton Head now.’

So saying, Mrs. Dent put my cup of tea on the little table by the bedside, and left the room. ‘ What a kind motherly woman she is!’ I said to myself as she went downstairs.

This was my second visit to Thorpe-Houe Farm. Three years before I had been sent here in search of health : and I had come again on the same errand now ; but this time I had brought with me far more hope and ground for hope than on the former occasion. When I left my cousin's house—three weeks previous to the time of which I am writing now—my nerves were already beginning to tingle with the painful sensations of returning vitality ; and during those three weeks I had made progress enough to satisfy even good old Mrs. Dent.

But it is not of myself that I am about to write—that is, not more than I can help—my own life-history would be wearisome ; but the history of another life, part of which was lived alongside of mine, is too brief to strain the reader's attention.

When I first went to Thorpe-Houe Farm, Lizzie Dent, the farmer's only child, was a bright, beautiful, merry-hearted girl of seventeen. An impartial observer might have said that she was a little too wild and giddy, and a little too fond of dress ; but her never-failing good-temper, her cheerfulness, and her bonnie, winsome ways, soon made me very tolerant of her little defects. And then her beauty—even when I was young myself, I could never withstand the fascination of a really pretty face, radiant with the charms of freshness and youth, and light-

hearted innocence; and now that I am older, and sadder, and plainer, a face like Lizzie Dent's gladdens me almost as much as the sunshine.

Mrs. Dent—Lizzie's mother—was a thorough Yorkshirewoman, inclining to the Saxon type: capable of strong feeling and affection, rarely or never visible on the surface; gifted with keen perceptions, yet slow to believe—slower still to change a belief once adopted; just in judgment, naturally hospitable and benevolent; possessing a limited imagination shaded with superstition, and holding the faith of her fathers with more of Northern tenacity than of religious veneration.

I have always imagined that Isaac Dent must have come of a race that was more Celtic in its origin. Possessing all the self-sufficiency and independence of the Yorkshire dalesman, he had less stolidness of manner, less reserve, and perhaps somewhat less shrewdness, than is generally found amongst these primitive natives of the North. There was nothing of the 'tyke' in Isaac's nature, not even when it came to be tried by that most searching test of the Northern character, 'selling a horse.'

Remembering them all with much pleasure, I was glad when it was decided that I should try the air of Thorpe-Houe again. I took out Lizzie's photograph, and imagination lit up the colourless thing

until it was as glowing as she herself had seemed to me three years before. The sunbeams glittered in her luxuriant golden hair, and lent colour to the well-remembered band of light-blue velvet that held it back. Her violet eyes danced with mischief as she teased her father: quivered with love-light as she saw Frank Raithwaite walking up the road; or softened into tenderness as they used to do when she fancied I was weary or in pain. Very happy I was to lie and dream of being tended by Lizzie Dent again.

And then I wondered what changes had taken place since I was at Thorpe-Houe before. Were the Raithwaites still at the Crag Farm? and the Featherstones yet at Dales-end? Was old Mr. Stainton, the Squire's steward, yet alive? and was he still in the habit of coming up to Thorpe-Houe of an evening to accompany the waltzes and polkas that Lizzie played on the piano, with the wonderful old violin that he had used in bygone years to lead the singers at Redholm Church? . . . Or was the spring sunshine whitening his grave with daisies?

I grew restless. I longed to be amongst them all again; longed for the

‘ Low of cattle and song of birds,
And health and quiet and kindly words ;’

to be relieved from the burden of the obtrusive

hospitality which I received from my cousin and his wife; to feel the fresh moorland breezes on my hot forehead; to lie on the heather, watching the drifting cloud-shadows sweep across the landscape, listening to the sweet, thrilling voice of the lark, and longing for pocket editions of favourite poets, that I might feel my soul more akin to theirs than one can ever do indoors, and repeating over to myself scraps from one or another just as they rose to my memory. Cheerful scraps from Wordsworth, for

‘ Ne'er could fancy bend the buoyant lark
To melancholy service—hark! O hark!’

And lines like these, brilliant yet sad, from Shelley:

‘ With thy clear, keen joyance
Languor cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou lovest; but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.

• • • • •

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.’

I am afraid Shelley swept the chords of my heart's music more accurately.

Then my attention would be drawn from the sentiments of sublime poetry to the details of very

simple prose. Lizzie Dent would tell me, in her clear, sweet voice, quaint little stories of the three years she had spent at school near York; and then of things that had happened since, things that had to be spoken of in low tones, with fitful blushes, and with many apologies for troubling Miss West with Frank Raithwaite's sayings and doings. And then I—Alice West—would give sage counsel, which was generally received with a smile so incredulous and non-comprehensive that it would have been provoking but for its sweetness.

With the remembrance of all this green and vivid in my memory, I found myself at Thorpe-Houe again. I was welcomed warmly and eagerly. Everything about the farm looked exactly the same. The trees in the gill above and below were in the most brilliant stage of greenness. I could hear the waterfall in the distance, and the little beck gurgling round the corner of the home meadow. The old-fashioned garden in front of the house was gay with stocks and cabbage-roses, wall-flowers and southernwood, mint and marigolds; the farmyard behind was full of well-fed, sleek-looking cattle, standing or lying drowsily in the sun; the chickens pecked about industriously, the ducks and geese waddled noisily along the muddy edges of the pond; and the stables and cow-houses scooped out of the solid mass of

lichened rock that towered up behind Thorpe-Houe still had the same singular and picturesque effect.

Isaac Dent was bustling about in the old brisk manner, a little stouter and a little redder than before. Esther, his wife, was as kindly and good-natured as ever, and answered all my questions about everything and everybody quite satisfactorily. Old Mr. Stainton was yet alive, and his belief in his own perfection as a violinist unshaken. The Featherstones were still at Dales-end; and old Matthew Raithwaite had married again, sold Crag Farm, and gone to live at the Espe House.

And what of Lizzie Dent—golden-haired Lizzie? My surprise rose to my lips when I saw her, so strangely altered was she. Her face was pale and worn, her eyes heavy; she went about her little household tasks in a weary, depressed manner, stopping from time to time to look vacantly out of the window, and unconsciously twining her hands one over the other with a nervous tightening grasp that left them perfectly white; and then, starting like one suddenly awakened from sleep, she would look flushed and confused, as if surprised to find herself in the kitchen, the 'house,' or the parlour of Thorpe-Houe Farm. . . . I watched her for the first few hours after my arrival sadly and involuntarily, wondering much what had so changed Lizzie Dent—

wild, mischievous Lizzie—winsome, merry-hearted Lizzie. The three short years had dealt hardly with the little moorland maid.

As the days passed on I began to gain strength rapidly. Bracing air and lovely scenery, careful nursing and perfect rest, 'sitting in sunshine calm and sweet,' taking walks with Lizzie Dent up the gill, out on the moor, through the fir-copse—how pleasant it all was! How vividly I saw it all a moment ago, as I sat recalling the *tableaux vivants* that passed before me during that one short summer at Thorpe-Houe Farm!

During these first days the only drawback to my enjoyment was the change in Lizzie Dent. At first when we were alone together she made little efforts to talk cheerfully and naturally, as she would have done to a stranger; but when the strangeness wore off she relapsed into the sad silence that seemed to have become more congenial to her than anything else. When I spoke to her she answered me in a low voice and with few words; if I read to her, her thoughts were evidently far away; and in answer to all my inquiries about her health I received nothing but gentle assurances that she was quite well.

There was something very touching in Lizzie's quietness and sadness—something very fascinating in

the childish face so shaded and refined with sorrow. She was still dressed very carefully, as neatly and as daintily as ever. Her bright golden hair was in just as beautiful order as it had always been. There was no personal neglect, no apparent consciousness that there were signs on the 'damask cheek' of the 'worm i' th' bud'; but the signs were there—were visible in the expression of almost every feature of her face. When she raised her heavy eyelids, it was sad to see that all the laughing, sparkling light had died out of the violet-blue eyes underneath; that there was a thoughtful, wistful, far-off look in them that I could not see without wishing to understand. The wish was not prompted by curiosity. In all cases of real suffering I have much faith in what Sir Walter Scott somewhere calls 'mental blood-letting,' and some of the sayings of an old writer came to my mind frequently when I looked at Lizzie Dent.

'All adversitie finds ease in complaining (as Isidore holds); and 'tis a solace to relate it.

'A friend's counsel is a charm.

'A gentle speech is the true cure of a wounded soul.'

I thought of these, and I longed to be of use to her, to comfort her, and yet I could make no effort to win her confidence. The attempt would have been inexpressibly difficult to me; besides, I knew that if it was given voluntarily, it would probably be given at a time when relief was most needed.

CHAPTER II.

COMMUNICATORY.

THE first time I was at Thorpe-Houe the friendship existing between the Dents and the Raithwaites had been of a nature so pleasant and intimate, and I, though a stranger amongst them, had found that the unconstrained intercourse and the genial hospitality were sources of so much enjoyment, that I had unconsciously looked forward to a renewal of them with a desire that was amusing to me when disappointment showed how strong it had been. I was really disappointed when I found how completely the old harmony was destroyed. I recalled the Crag Farm and its household to my memory. I thought of Mr. Raithwaite, a tall, white-haired, kindly old farmer, whose manner to me had always been marked by the same thoughtful gentleness that he would have shown to a sick child. I remembered his two sons—powerfully-built, athletic men, taller even than their father. David, the elder, dark, stern, silent, and thoughtful, ungainly in appearance, awkward in manner; yet neither mindless nor heartless if one might trust his large, clear brown eyes, soft and expressive at times as those of a woman. Frank, the younger, of a rather

slighter build, a more florid type; cultivating assiduously a light-coloured moustache, running his fingers through the wavy hair that rested gracefully upon his high forehead; endeavouring to put a melancholy expression into his rather fascinating blue eyes when Lizzie Dent flirted with David; and then suddenly putting on his gayest, most pleasing manner, and trying to get up a rival flirtation with any other young farmer's daughter who happened to be present. All this I remembered as I thought of the Crag Farm.

But these were only memories. During the first few days of my second visit to Thorpe-Houe I learnt some new facts of a more practical nature. A year and a half previously Mr. Raithwaite, suffering from rheumatism, had been advised to try change of air. He had gone to Danesborough for a few weeks, become acquainted with a Mrs. and Miss Spencer, the widow and daughter of a Leeds cloth manufacturer, who had died insolvent. The widow was in much distress; poor old Mr. Raithwaite was kindly and compassionate, and the short acquaintance ended in a hasty marriage. Fortunately for Mr. Raithwaite and for his family, he was a man well-to-do in the world. Things had gone thrivingly with him from his youth up, so that when he found, a little to his dismay, that his new wife and her daughter were utterly incapable

of managing farmhouse or dairy, kitchen or poultry-yard, it had not been a matter of so much importance to him as it might have been. He had seen at once how matters stood, sold his farm, rented the Espe House, and, persuaded by Mrs. Raithwaite and Miss Spencer, had refurnished the old place with the most fashionable upholstery that could be procured at the neighbouring market-town of Pennerby.

As a matter of course, these proceedings had been commented upon and condemned without reserve. What was old Matthew thinking of? What was to become of his sons? Why had he not left them on the farm? Was he going to keep the two stalwart men always idling at home as they were doing now? Everyone could see how David was chafing against it—how he tried to find occupation for himself at the Espe House, doing odd bits of repairs, working diligently in the gardens and orchards, or attending to the pony and the cow, or the pigs and the poultry, from morning till night, yet unable to hide from anyone gifted with moderate perceptions the fact that he was intensely dissatisfied with the aimless, almost useless, life he was leading. Very different it was with Frank. Quite contented was he to spend his mornings in riding over to Pennerby on the old gray pony to buy wools or silks for Amelia Spencer, and his evenings at home when there was company, visiting when

there was not. No complaints or murmurings escaped from the lips of Mr. Frank.

All this information I had from Isaac and Esther Dent; but there was nothing in it to satisfy my half-formed conjectures about Lizzie. Certainly Isaac Dent spoke somewhat contemptuously when he talked of Mrs. Raithwaite and her daughter: and even Esther spoke in a compassionate, half-pitying way that was slightly suggestive of other feelings when she alluded to Miss Spencer; but were these indications of jealousy or ill-will? I imagined not—suspecting strongly that the fact of the new-comers being ‘West-country folks,’ or, in other words, natives of the West Riding, was the sole head and front of their offending. I found afterwards that this suspicion was nearly correct. In the opinion of the genuine North Yorkshireman, his division of the county is so infinitely superior to the other two, that he finds a kind of scornful commiseration for everyone and everything eastern or western rise in his heart quite naturally. How Matthew Raithwaite had been able to subdue this feeling was an unfathomable mystery to Isaac Dent.

Three weeks passed on, and then came the rainy Thursday morning which I have mentioned. During those three weeks there had been very little inter-

course between the inmates of the Espe House and those of Thorpe-Houe Farm. Occasionally I had heard David Raithwaite talking to Isaac Dent in the farmyard, or to Mrs. Dent and Lizzie in the 'house'; and once, when I was out on the moor, Mr. Frank and Miss Spencer had called, but, to my surprise, I found that this visit had been partially intended for me. On my little work-table in the parlour was lying a highly-glazed card, containing the names of 'Mrs. Raithwaite and Miss Spencer, The Espe House.' Lizzie blushed a little, and smiled when she saw me take it up.

'Shall you return the visit, Miss West?' she asked.

'Yes,' I said. And then Lizzie and I arranged, weather permitting, to go to Redholm on the following Thursday; but the weather did not permit. I was obliged to stay contentedly indoors.

Shortly after noon the day cleared up. The sun shone out, the rain-drops glittered as they fell from the trees, the birds sang in the pear-tree that grew in front of the house, the roses on the bush close to the parlour window bent gracefully under the weight of their silver burden, the smell of the new-mown hay stole fragrantly over the garden hedge. Everything was brighter and greener and fresher than before. The thought of a long walk was very tempting: 'And

yet the ground will be damp for some hours,' I thought, as I watched the little streams trickling down the garden-path; and I wondered if Lizzie was *very* wishful to go to Redholm that afternoon.

Presently Lizzie came into the little parlour. I saw at once that she was looking brighter, more animated than usual.

'Well, Lizzie,' I said, 'are you anticipating a pleasant walk?'

Her face clouded a little.

'You didn't think of going to Redholm, did you, Miss West? Mother thought it would be too wet for you to go out this afternoon.'

I felt, and perhaps looked, rather perplexed. Lizzie blushed a little, hesitated, and went on:

'Father has made up his mind to go to the sale at Pennerby, after all; he is going to take the gig, and mother thought that if I went with him I could do the shopping whilst he is at the sale much better than I can on market-day, when the shops are so full. . . . And, perhaps, it wouldn't be much use going to Redholm to-day,' continued Lizzie, blushing crimson. 'The Raithwaites are going to Pennerby too, some of them.'

I could hardly help smiling as Lizzie concluded in such true womanly fashion, putting all the pith of her speech into the last sentence.

‘Make your mind quite easy as far as I am concerned, Lizzie,’ I said. ‘I shall only be too glad to wait for a drier day.’

And then Lizzie went off to dress, looking more cheerful than I had seen her look for some time; but I had begun, during the last week or ten days, to suspect that slight improvement was visible in her, and after tea, when Mrs. Dent came in to sit by me with her knitting, she confirmed my suspicions.

We had begun by talking of the dresses and bonnets that Lizzie had gone to buy. ‘Lizzie had such good taste,’ Mrs. Dent said, ‘an’ she wasn’t wantin’ in judgment neither, considerin’ ’at she was so young; an’ she knew what would wash an’ wear better than many a woman o’ twice her age.’

A short silence followed. Then the sound of Mrs. Dent’s knitting-needles ceased, she drew her chair a little nearer to the sofa on which I was sitting, and, fixing her expressive gray eyes full on my face, she said, ‘Miss West, has Lizzie iver told you of—of her trouble yet?’

‘No,’ I replied; ‘but I did not require to be told that she had borne—perhaps is still bearing—the burden that falls to the lot of most women at least once in their lives.’

‘It will only be once in my Lizzie’s life.’

‘Indeed, I hope you are right,’ I answered as

cheerfully as I could, but not without a suspicion that Mrs. Dent's meaning was other than mine.

When the ice of Northern reserve is once broken, the water is often found to be very warm underneath. The outpouring of Mrs. Dent's long pent-up feelings reminded me, in its warmth and force, of the escape of an Icelandic geyser. She began by telling me, in a tremulous, agitated way, many things which I knew already; of the close intimacy which had existed between her own family and the Raithwaites; of the long-understood, yet never clearly-expressed, engagement that had existed between Frank and Lizzie; of her own and her husband's disapproval of the idle, careless, extravagant young man; and of the fact—which she regretted much—that, dreading to interfere with their daughter's happiness, they had suppressed every sign of their disesteem. Bitterly, she said, her husband and herself lamented their own conduct in the matter—that they had allowed Frank Raithwaite to come to their house whenever he chose for nearly two years and a half, trifling with Lizzie's affections, offering her the half-love that had taxed his selfish nature to the utmost, and withdrawing his attentions when it suited him so to do without a word of explanation. . . . Then Mrs. Dent grew calmer, and entered into details which I need only mention briefly—details explaining how a visitor named Miss Edwards

had come to stay at the Espe House during the previous autumn, and how, after her arrival, Frank Raithwaite's visits to Thorpe-Houe had become rarer, and how the change in his manner and behaviour to Lizzie had been visible to everyone. From that time the light had seemed to fade out of Lizzie Dent's life altogether. She had made no lamentation, sought no comfort—not even from her mother. 'Perhaps it would have been better for her if she had,' Mrs. Dent said, with a pathetic vibration in her voice.

'Did Miss Edwards stay at the Espe House long?' I inquired.

'Near about six weeks, if I remember right,' Mrs. Dent replied.

'Do you think there was, or is, any engagement between her and Frank Raithwaite?'

'No, ma'am, I don't think there is; but I don't know, an' I don't care to know; my thoughts seem to run o' Lizzie night an' day; an' for her sake I wish he would niver darken my door again. How he dares to come here—as he does yet now an' then, when he's anybody to come with him—I don't know; but it's shy looks an' cold welcome 'at he gets fra me an' Isaac.'

'I wonder if Lizzie is trying not to think any more about him,' I said, 'or if the poor child is going on hoping yet?'

'I don't know—I only wish I did; an' it's that

makes me wish he'd keep away. Last week, when he called here wi' Miss Spencer, Lizzie was sittin' sewin' i' t' house beside me as quiet an' content as could be. An' then they came, an', afore they'd been here ten minutes, Miss Spencer reckoned 'at she wanted to see them Dorkin's of ours, and she doesn't know a Dorkin' frev a Bantam; an' I went into t' yard with her for a bit, an' when I came in again Frank was sayin' some sort o' nonsense to Lizzie, an' she was laughin' an' blushin' in a way 'at made me as vexed as iver I was in my life; an' she was cheerfuller for two or three days after; an' I know it was t' idea o' meetin' them 'at made her so keen o' goin' to Pennerby to-day. I wish I'd niver put it into her head about goin'; I don't think she'd iver have thought of it if it hadn't been for me; but I didn't know then 'at the Raithwaites were goin' to be there.'

A little longer we talked of Lizzie, and then Mrs. Dent began to fold up her knitting.

'I think I must go an' be gettin' supper ready,' she said; 'they'll be hungry when they come back—father will, at any rate; an' as for Lizzie, why, it'll depend upon what sort o' spirits she's in; if she's as downhearted as she used to be all t' winter whenever she'd seen Frank Raithwaite, she'll eat no more nor would satisfy a good-sized sparrow.'

Not in the least 'downhearted' was Lizzie Dent that evening; indeed, she was more natural, more cheerful, than I had yet seen her during this my second visit; she laughed and chattered in a pleasant, animated way that brought back the memory of her former self quite vividly; and yet she was not in any degree excited or overstrung. The change was not only in her manners—her voice had softer, pleasanter tones in it; she moved about less wearily; and when—after showing me her purchases—she sat down to her work, I noticed that her fingers moved with more than twice their usual energy. Her eyes were brighter; a faint tint of the old rich colouring was visible on her lip and cheek; and I could almost have fancied that the sweet little face was a shade rounder than it had been. But I did not rejoice over these signs as I might have done if Mrs. Dent had been less communicative in the afternoon.

I did not learn any details of the meeting that had caused this variation in Lizzie; but I conjectured, of course, that she had seen Frank Raithwaite; and I had heard enough of him to fear that the poor child must be beginning to rebuild her castle of hope on very frail foundations. . . . How I longed to warn her! How I blamed her father and mother for their mistaken notions—for their shortsighted views of their own duty! Supposing that Mr. Frank should

yet choose to be true to Lizzie, how could she, or any-one who cared for her, ever dream that she would be permanently happy with a conceited, selfish, thin-natured man like Frank Raithwaite? I grieved as if Lizzie had been my sister.

CHAPTER III.

THE ESPE HOUSE.

WE did not go to Redholm the next day—it was Friday, and Lizzie had to help with the ‘upstairs cleaning.’ During the forenoon and part of the afternoon I sat in the home meadow amongst the hay, reading, or dreaming, or sewing, just as I felt inclined. Such a pleasant day it was; warm and sunny, and breezy and fragrant. The haymakers were leading the hay from a field at the other side of the farm. I could see the heavily-laden waggons moving slowly along the fields that lay on the sloping sides of the highland, and hear the shouts of the men and the clatter of the waggons and horses as they came up to the stackyard to unload. Mrs. Dent, in her lilac cotton gown and morning cap, was bustling in and out of the dairy. Now and then I

caught sight of Lizzie flitting about amongst the ducks and chickens in her pretty light print dress, and broad hat of coarse white straw trimmed with blue ribbon. Pleasant sights and sounds were everywhere. The birds chirped and twittered in the gill at the bottom of the meadow, the lark sang overhead, the cattle were lowing in far-off fields. The roof of the old farmhouse, rich with the tints of many-coloured lichens, was dotted with pigeons and doves of varied plumage. The smoke curled lazily from the quaint chimney-stacks. The wood-crowned rock towered up behind, forming a cool, dark background to the summer scene.

Just such another calm sweet day was the day following, when Lizzie and I started off across the corner of Barton moor for the Espe House. I was stronger, Lizzie was brighter, and altogether it was the pleasantest walk we had yet had. We were soon out of the sea of purple ling, that stretched away to the east and west; and presently we came to the broad, sloping common, or *side*—Redholm-side—as it was called by the dales-folk; the few labourers' cottages and the one substantial farmhouse that skirted the moor forming a hamlet quite distinct from the village of Redholm proper.

Very pleasant it was on Redholm-side that sunny July day. Picturesque cottages built of rough gray

stone, the dark, unevenly-thatched roof propped up with fir-boles, and half covered with verdant patches of moss, tall grasses, and house-leek; luxuriant little gardens in front, full of herbs and roses and peas and daisies; dark-brown stacks of turf and peat for firing; little rills of water trickling down from the moor, sparkling in the sunshine as they glided down the hilly common, and forming little ponds by the roadside; ruddy-faced children in corduroys and brass buttons, or frocks and pinafores of darkest blue print patterned with orange, making mud-pies by the side of a water-trough, and stopping to stare with astonishment as we passed; flocks of geese flapping their wings and waddling along; stray donkeys cropping the stunted grass; here and there a black-faced moorland sheep that had wandered down from its wide pasture.

Beyond the common, a long green lane; then a shady walk through a fir-copse; and at last we stand on the brow of the upland that overhangs the village of Redholm. We sit down on a stone to rest for a few moments—a huge, gray, weather-worn stone of such curious shape that I conjecture it to be the socket of a wayside cross.

Very glorious are the views that are spread out above and below and all around us. Miles of treeless, houseless moor stretching away to the horizon on the

top of the opposite highland ; the valley at our feet, through which the beck runs, widening rapidly into a river as it nears the picturesque stone bridge at Redholm ; the sloping sides of the dale mapped out into many-tinted fields, dotted with village spires and thriving farmsteads, with dark fir plantations, and numerous woods or gills of greener hue. Redholm itself—a village with one straggling, sloping street, leading from the bridge and extending halfway up Barton Lane ; the odd, irregular, high-gabled houses, half buried in trees ; the red-tiled or ling-thatched roofs rising one above the other ; and the thin blue smoke dissolving against the dark foliage. The tall, handsome spire of the church towering above a group of trees about halfway down the lane which we have yet to descend ; and on the opposite bank of the river, at some distance from the village, the long, low, ivy-covered building called the Espe House. Lizzie points it out to me. ‘Isn’t it pretty, Miss West!’ she says, with a blush and a smile.

Very pretty I think it is, even at the distance—prettier still when we stand on the bridge at Redholm. The shallow little river gleams and winds away out of sight ; tall trees dip gracefully into the water ; to the left, the Espe House stands on a green, shelving bank, its peaked gables and curious chimneys peeping out above the orchard-trees. We cross the bridge

and turn down the narrow white lane ; someone is standing near the garden gate. It is Mr. Frank Raithwaite.

I think Lizzie must have been startled a little. For a moment—as he sauntered up to us, took off his hat, and bowed in his most graceful manner—I saw that she was pale, that there was a look on her face which I did not like ; but it passed away as suddenly as it came ; the simple child blushed crimson as her hand touched his.

If I had thought Frank Raithwaite's tall, well-built figure, his wavy hair, well-kept moustache, and winning blue eyes dangerously fascinating to Lizzie three years before, when he was working, or pretending to work, on the Crag Farm, I was doubly compelled to think so now. Never had fashionable citizen seemed to me more carefully dressed, more gentleman-like, or more thoroughly conscious of it, than this Northern farmer's son. His light-gray suit was of the most modern style, his tie of the prettiest mauve, his hands of the whitest, his gloves of the best. He had manners, too, of which he had no need to be ashamed, and his native Doric was evidently fast giving way to something as nearly like English as might be ; only a slight, never-to-be-lost 'burr,' and occasional turns of phraseology, reminded one of the Yorkshireman.

‘We’ve been expecting you every day for this last fortnight or more,’ he said pleasantly; ‘and my father has made many inquiries after you, Miss West. He will be delighted to see you.’

‘Is Mrs. Raithwaite at home?’ I asked.

‘Yes; and Amelia too. I’ll tell them you are here,’ Frank said, as we entered the empty sitting-room. ‘Take a seat on the sofa; it’s pleasant near the open window, and there’s a nice view of the river. And you can take this easy-chair, Lizzie; it’s a favourite of mine. I can recommend it strongly.’

Poor little Lizzie! I can see her now as she sat there, looking so nervous, so bewildered, and yet so happy, in that curious old-fashioned room, with its small, stone-mullioned windows, its low ceiling, and its wide fireplace, with which the gaudy damask, the cheap, showy furniture, and the bazaar-like display of fancy-work, contrasted so unpleasantly. Painfully tidy the room was: no sign of books or work, no birds or flowers—nothing that could disarrange the display of bead-mats, wax fruit, and vulgar ornaments.

Mr. Raithwaite was the first to appear. He was as kindly, and gentle, and warm-hearted as ever, and chatted in his broad dialect to ‘little Lisbeth’ much as if she had been his grandchild: chiding her for never coming to see him; accusing her of having lost her ‘roses,’ and of forgetting how to

laugh, till her cheeks were as glowing, and her smile as charming, as I had ever seen them.

The drawing-room door opened again: Mrs. Raithwaite and Miss Spencer came in. Mrs. Raithwaite was a lively, pleasant little woman, apparently some twenty-five or thirty years younger than her husband. Her daughter—a tall, slight, awkward-looking girl of twenty summers, with a sallow complexion, unpleasant light-brown eyes, and a large sensual mouth, with a curl of sarcasm at the corners—made me shrink into myself for a moment, and feel as if I needed a protector. It was only for a moment, but I could not forget it afterwards.

Old Matthew Raithwaite talked of the weather and the crops. Mrs. Raithwaite criticised Dr. Farnworth's sermons and Mrs. Farnworth's new bonnet—without acidity, though. Miss Spencer and Lizzie were deep in the mysteries of raised woolwork, poor Lizzie having to blush terribly for her ignorance of the latest designs. Presently Mr. Frank came in; he couldn't find David, he said, as he seated himself on a low chair near Lizzie.

Amelia Spencer drew her chair away from the table and placed it near the window, smiling a thin, sarcastic smile as she did so, and glancing at me with eyes that had in them meaning of some kind—meaning beyond my power to interpret. For some

time she talked to me in a forced, disagreeable voice of cushions and slippers, antimacassars and smoking-caps, and then—noticing, probably, that my attention had wandered out through the open window, and was lost in the blue haze that hung over the river—she suggested a walk round the garden. I was grateful to her for this.

‘But you will have a cup of tea before you go out of doors, won’t you?’ Mrs. Raithwaite said. ‘I ought to have thought of it before. You have had a long walk, and I quite forgot that you are an invalid, Miss West.’

‘Thank you,’ I said; ‘but I am fast losing all claim to that title.’

‘But what mun they hev *tea* for?’ interposed old Mr. Raithwaite, in his easy, kindly voice. ‘Ha’ ya nothin’ na better than that stuff te set afore ’em?’

‘Come into the garden and have some strawberries,’ Frank suggested—a suggestion which was agreed to unanimously; and very soon we were sitting under the orchard trees with strawberries in baskets and cabbage-leaves, plates and sugar, jugs of cream and glasses of milk, set out on a little table. Mrs. Raithwaite was an agreeable hostess; Frank was attentive—especially to Lizzie, who sat near to him, and was bright and animated. Miss Spencer watched them with a peculiar expression on her face.

Over me an unaccountable spirit of sadness crept coldly.

Strange that there should be any room for sad thoughts on such a day and in such a spot as that pleasant leafy orchard in Redholm Dale. Strange that there—with the sun shining through the trees overhead, making the soft greensward

‘A carpet all alive
With shadows flung from leaves;’

with the birds twittering in the boughs, the Espe rippling on with a sweet soothing murmur; with light, and sunshine, and joyance all round—strange that *there* the shadows of unbidden guests should flit under the trees; that the echo of warning voices from out the far distant past should reach me; but it was so.

‘Experience,’ says Carlyle, ‘doth take dreadfully high wages, but she teacheth like none other.’ True, most true; for the lessons she teaches, if rightly understood, are fraught with a power which cannot be gained from any other kind of knowledge—the power of true prescience, of seeing in the future the vanishing-point toward which the given lines of the present must of necessity converge. Strange it is, and sad, to watch the perspective of some lives.

Again I had wandered away—very far away from the Espe House and the orchard; a rustling amongst

the trees, a footstep behind, recalled me. It was David Raithwaite: the self-same David of old—tall, strong, ungainly, and awkward, and dressed apparently with a view to affording Mr. Frank the advantage of contrast. It was pleasant to see the light steal into his large brown eyes, and the change that passed over his dark, stern face as he shook hands with Lizzie and me and uttered his brief greeting. Very brief it was, but lacking none of the charm of sincerity.

‘And where may *you* have been all this time, Mr. David?’ Lizzie inquired, with something of the old pertness.

‘I’ve been over to John Shaw’s to borrow a plane, Miss Lizzie.’

‘Have you? And how is old John getting on? I haven’t seen him for months.’

‘Haven’t you really, Miss Dent?’ said Amelia Spencer. ‘How you must regret it! I do think, of all the disagreeable old heathens I ever met—and I have met a good many since I came to Redholm—certainly the worst of the lot is John Shaw. It was only the other day I said to him, quite civilly: “And how does the farm pay these hard times, John?” “Nobbut middlin’, Miss Spencer—nobbut middlin’,” he said; “but ah could mak it paäy a deal better if it wasn’t for neets an’ Sundays.”’

Old Mr. Raithwaite laughed. 'Just like John—just like John,' he said, with evident appreciation of his neighbour's pessimism.

David Raithwaite had turned aside from the little group, and stood with folded arms leaning against the trunk of a tree close by the river-side. I could only see his face now and then when the summer breeze swayed the branches to and fro. It was a gloomy, thoughtful face—even more so than of old, it seemed; but I had little opportunity for reading it. We, who sat on the grass eating strawberries and cream, grew somewhat noisy in our mirth. David Raithwaite sauntered up by the side of the river, and I saw him no more that day.

Soon afterwards, we left the Espe House; and—a little to my regret—Miss Spencer and Frank Raithwaite accompanied us as far as Redholm-side. I had thought to be alone with Lizzie as we walked back, and had meant to translate for her the echoes of the warnings that were yet ringing in my ears; but doubtless it was better that the opportunity was denied me; Lizzie Dent was in no mood that evening to listen to any voice but the voice of him whose low, false accents she was drinking in so eagerly.

It was wonderful to note the improvement in Lizzie after that day. The roundness and freshness

came back to her cheek, the sweetness to her voice; her merry laugh echoed through the old farmhouse; she went flitting about the garden, or amongst the ducks and chickens, with a step so light and free and graceful that again and again I found myself watching her with involuntary admiration. It was a feeling different from that I had had for her in her younger days. She had charmed me then by her gaiety and playfulness, her beauty and tenderness: to these a nameless fascination was added now; a fascination that was neither thoughtfulness, nor dignity, nor womanliness; but a winning grace that borrowed something from each of the three.

CHAPTER IV.

‘WAS NOT THIS LOVE INDEED?’

THE summer days passed on. Cloudless skies stretched over the purple moors, the hot sun poured over hill and dale, the uplands surged with the waves of golden corn, the rustling sound brought vivid dreams of blue ripples, white foam, and salt sea breezes.

On one of these hot days I went down, book in

one hand, work in the other, to the bottom of the gill below Thorpe-Houe Farm. It was shady and cool under the trees; and I wandered on by the side of the beck for some time before I felt that I needed rest. When I did sit down, it was in a spot so lovely that even yet, on hot summer days, the memory of it 'haunts me like a tune of well-remembered music.'

Almost gloomy was the cool, dark blue shade under the trees by the side of the little stream. Giant boughs arching and twining overhead; moss-grown trunks and widespreading roots; dark green stones by the side, and in the middle of the beck; the clear brown water gurgling and eddying round them with soft murmurings. Rare grasses and wild flowers; graceful, glossy ferns bending into the water; a reedy little pool where some of Isaac Dent's cows stood knee-deep; a path through the trees; then an open glade. Distant trees on the other side; the rugged highland rising above. Glimpses of hot sky and yellow sunshine enhancing the charms of my cool, dark resting-place tenfold.

I think I had been sitting there but a very short time, when I saw a tall, dark figure coming up the path through the trees. It was David Raithwaite—fishing-rod in hand. He had intended going up as far as the mill, he said; but if I did not object to

the intrusion, he would sit down awhile : he was glad to find me alone.

His words were courteous, but he spoke abruptly, almost sternly ; and there was something in his manner that perplexed me at first, and then prepared me for disclosure of some kind. He had taken his seat on a large stone by the side of the stream ; placed his hat and fishing-rod on the bank behind him ; and for some minutes he sat silent and thoughtful. I watched his stern features, and studied the wonderful combination of strength and tenderness that was visible in them, with interest.

Presently David broke the silence. Some men would have broken it felicitously ; have worked round to the true starting-point with something of skill ; not so David Raithwaite. Pushing the dark hair back from his square white forehead, and raising his sunburnt face and large brown eyes, he said without prelude : ' Miss West, I want a friend.'

' Not an uncommon want, unfortunately,' I replied.

' How much do you believe in what the world calls friendship ?'

' How much ? That would be a difficult question for most people to answer, I imagine. It would be very difficult for me.'

' Why ?'

‘Because my faith in the tie that binds true friends together is unlimited.’

David smiled—

‘As men smile when they will not speak
Because of something bitter in the thought.’

I could almost read the bitter ‘something’; not quite.

‘Why do you smile?’ I said.

‘Only at the idea of your “unlimited faith.” Well for you that it has never been shaken!’

‘Well for me that it *has* been shaken—shaken to its very foundations. But for that I had never known the real depth and strength of it.’

David hesitated awhile; then he said with less abruptness: ‘Miss West, I have said that I want a friend, and I hope to find one in you; but I want your friendship for one who needs it more than I do. I’m speaking of Lizzie Dent. I’m not mistaken in thinking that you would do a good deal for Lizzie?’

‘No; you are not mistaken in that; but you must tell me very plainly what I can do, and how I can do it. I have wasted much time lately in fruitless efforts to discover how far it would be possible for me—a stranger, a mere lodger in Isaac Dent’s house—to interfere with his daughter’s happiness, or unhappiness.’

'Then you have seen that interference was necessary?'

'Pardon me if I speak plainly. I have seen and heard enough to make me very doubtful as to whether your brother will ever make Lizzie Dent happy.'

'You need have no more doubts about that, Miss West. Frank is engaged to March Edwards; and she is coming here again on a visit.'

There was silence by the brookside for some time.

* * * * *

'How long have you known this?' I inquired.

'Since yesterday. . . . I have given him my opinion on the matter, and told him that I meant to take the first opportunity of making it known up at Thorpe-Houe. I want you to tell them, if you will.'

'Of course you will not object to my mentioning your name.'

Again David hesitated: looked down into the water at his feet; across to the rocky side of the gill; then at me.

'Can you tell them without doing so?' he said; 'at any rate, do you think Lizzie need know that you heard it from me? She mayn't find it easy to believe, not at first; and if she doesn't, she'll blame everything and everybody but Frank. . . . I

don't want her to think hardly of me if it can be helped.'

'She cannot think hardly of you.'

'Perhaps not; but she will never think of me as I have thought of her for the last four years. I am speaking to you, Miss West, as I have spoken to no one else—as I shall never speak again; but I can't tell you all I have thought and felt while this has been going on. I would have given ten years of my life if I could have kept trouble away from Lizzie Dent. But she must hear the truth now—the sooner the better. I know what she'll feel; and it will be some comfort to me to know that you are helping her to bear it.'

Then I had guessed David Raithwaite's secret aright—guessed three years before that the love of that strong, silent, stern-looking man of some thirty years of age was given to the bright, childlike girl of seventeen, whose understood engagement to his brother Frank had kept him silent, and darkened a life that had never had overmuch sunshine in it. It was not a new story; but I had never read it for myself before.

Had I been able, I would have tried to offer David Raithwaite some slight consolation; but I was too much perplexed to think of anything but the meaningless platitudes and worn-out truisms

about time, patience, etc., etc., wherewith people generally endeavour to heal their friends' sorrows; for, as Benedick saith, 'Everyone can master a grief but he that has it.' It was not that I thought David Raithwaite needed any help of mine, but I longed to suggest some ground whereon he might build hope for the future—some gleam of light that should do something towards dispelling the evident gloom. But I was powerless for any good of that kind just then.

Still David Raithwaite sat on the moss-grown stone. I wished he would go. He had done his work; mine—my painful and difficult task—was yet to do, and I wanted to think of it, to consider how I should do it. Whilst he was sitting there I could think only of his sorrow, or of his brother's sin—for sin it was—and I judged it hardly and sternly. I was wrong in this.

It almost seemed as if David had read my thoughts—perhaps, to a certain extent, he had—for he was not slow of perception. He looked up, hesitated a little, and then said, with apparent difficulty :

'I suppose you would hardly believe me, Miss West, if I were to tell you that Frank is almost as sorry now as you or I could wish him to be?'

'Hardly,' I said. 'I might believe you imagined he was sorry; but I should think you were mistaken.'

‘I don’t think I am; Frank is not such a heartless fellow as he must seem to you just now. And, although he has behaved so badly in this, there’s more to be said for him than perhaps you would care to hear.’

‘You could not tell me anything that I could accept as an excuse for his conduct to Lizzie Dent.’

‘Perhaps not; I don’t want to make excuses for him. He has done wrong, I know; he knows it, too—and, as I have said, he’s sorry for it; but I don’t think I should have paid much heed to his sorrow if I thought the blame had been all his own.’

‘Do you want me to hear what you have to say in his favour?’

‘I do. I shouldn’t feel that I’d acted justly if I left you knowing only one side of the matter. There isn’t much to say on the other side—at least, I mustn’t make it much, for the sake of others—for the sake of my father. He’s an old man now, and he’s been kind to us—too kind in some things, too indulgent. In other things, perhaps, he’s been to blame; I think he’s been shortsighted; but the result never has been, isn’t now, and never will be, so bad for Frank as for me.’

David paused awhile, and then went on: ‘You won’t care to hear any details about money matters, Miss West; but my father has put it quite out of

Frank's power, or mine, to marry—except for money—or even to begin farming again, till his death. "We want for nothing," he says; "why can't we be content?" But we are not content—at least, I am not; and I shall probably go out to Australia next spring. Frank will marry March Edwards—marry her for the money she's just had left, and live the only life he's fitted for till the end of his days.'

'But you forget; there is nothing in all this to palliate your brother's conduct to Lizzie Dent. When Miss Edwards was here last autumn, she was, I understand, only a teacher of music; she had no wealth to attract him then; and yet it was then and for her sake that he first began to show himself the faithless, falsehearted being he is.'

'There, I can say nothing for him. He is naturally changeful—never knows his own mind two days together about anything. And he's naturally vain and open to flattery; and March Edwards is a clever woman, some eight or ten years older than he is. You can understand the rest.'

'I can understand nothing but the fact that he has dealt wrongfully by Lizzie Dent. And, speaking of money, Lizzie is Isaac Dent's only child: surely she will eventually have——'

'Isaac Dent may live twenty or thirty years yet. I hope he will.'

‘But putting all this aside,’ I said, ‘what can you say in explanation of your brother’s conduct during even the last few weeks? Has he not tried at every possible opportunity to renew the old intimacy between Lizzie Dent and himself?’

‘He has; and that’s been his greatest wrong-doing; that what he’s sorriest for; but he didn’t consider himself engaged to March Edwards until within the past fortnight. They’ve corresponded all the winter, and the lady has played her cards well; but I strongly suspect that Frank was getting tired of it, and couldn’t help the old feeling for Lizzie Dent coming over him again. It’s the legacy that brought matters to a crisis.’

Again we relapsed into silence; and then, with a few brief words of apology, David Raithwaite went away, love and pain and hopelessness written on every feature of his face. And I, Alice West, went back to Thorpe-Houé, bearing the burden of Lizzie Dent’s sorrow. I did not bear it alone long, only until I felt that I had strength to lift it from my own heart to Lizzie’s with care: the strength and the opportunity came together that same evening as we sat under the trees at the top of the home meadow.

We had been talking of indifferent things; Lizzie had been bright and playful; and I had hesitated to do the deed I had undertaken to do. A cruel deed it

was, I knew; for 'a blow with a word strikes deeper than a blow with a sword.' But it was no use waiting longer; twilight was falling, and I might not have another opportunity until it was too late—until Lizzie had heard what I had to tell from other lips than mine. Dreading this, I forced myself to speak of something that should help me to begin.

'Lizzie,' I said, 'I think you are stronger than you were a while ago, are you not?'

'Yes, I think I am; I never feel so tired now as I did in the winter. How strange I've never thought of it before! and I ought to have been very thankful.'

'Yes, indeed you ought; and it isn't too late to be so now—not at all too late. . . . Lizzie, my child, do you think your new strength will help you to bear new sorrow—or, rather, an old sorrow with new pain in it?—if not, remember that more and higher strength may be had for the asking.'

'What are you thinking of, Miss West?—what are you going to tell me? Oh! don't keep me in suspense; only tell me that it isn't anything about—about Frank Raithwaite. I can bear anything else.'

'It *is* about him, Lizzie, and it is something that will be very hard to bear; but you will bear it bravely, won't you, for your mother's sake and for mine?'

'I will try—yes, I will try; but I want—I want——'

I never knew what it was that Lizzie had wanted just then. She slipped from her seat on the root of the sycamore—slipped down till her head rested on my arm, and I saw that on her ashen-gray face was the same look that I had seen when we met Frank Raithwaite on the day that we went to the Espe House. I think she was not quite unconscious, but she remained motionless for some time;—so still and pallid she was that I grew afraid, and placing her on the grass, I ran across the meadow, down by the side of the gill, and filled my hat with water. When I returned Lizzie was lying just as I had left her; but after I had bathed her face a little while she revived, and she was stronger and calmer by far than I had expected she would be.

‘I am so sorry,’ she began, ‘so very sorry. I must have given you such a great deal of trouble—and I knew all you were doing, but I couldn’t speak.’

‘Never mind the trouble, Lizzie. Are you better?’

‘Oh yes, much better, thank you. . . . But tell me, Miss West—tell me what you were going to say before. I will be quite good now.’

Knowing that the blow must come, and that suspense would only be torture, I told Lizzie—told her all that I had learnt from David Raithwaite in the afternoon. I had put my arm round her, she held my hand tightly in hers, and I could hear her re-

strained breathing, and feel the heavy, unequal throbbings of her heart quite distinctly. I made very little effort to alleviate the pain I was causing: I did not try for one moment to make her believe that I thought her sorrow no sorrow at all. I think she felt this, and was grateful for it. She seemed to know instinctively that I understood her and sympathized with her.

When she had heard the worst she still sat in silence; but after a time, much to my satisfaction, hot tears began to rain down upon my hands. An undefined fear that had possessed me was quieted at once, and I waited patiently till she could 'give sorrow words.' I had to wait some time—to wait till the last sweet songs of the birds in the gill were hushed into silence, till the moon rose over Barton Head, and till the valley below and the hillside meadow where we sat were flooded with her silvery light.

Very gentle, very pathetic, was Lizzie's voice when she spoke.

'I won't ask you who told you about it, Miss West,' she said. 'You would never have repeated it unless you had been quite, *quite* sure, would you?'

'No, indeed, Lizzie; if there had been any possibility of its being untrue, or even doubtful, I should never have mentioned it.'

‘And you think there can be no mistake—I mean, the person who told you was quite certain?’

‘Yes, Lizzie, quite.’

Then came another pause, which was broken by half-suppressed sobs, and indistinct words of which I could not even guess the meaning. Presently her grief grew less wild, and between fitful bursts of sobs and tears she uttered sorrowful little plaints that touched my heart with a touch that was like pressure on a bare nerve.

‘Have I been wrong, Miss West—have I? But I couldn’t help it: I never knew when or how I began to love him. I *didn’t* love him at first—not till long after he said he loved me; but I liked to be near him—I liked to be loved. And then he *made* me love him. . . . And, oh! you will never know—no one will ever know—*how much* I’ve loved him. When I thought his love for me was gone, I could think of nothing else night or day, night or day. I never slept—never. I did nothing but long for the old, old love that I thought would never come back. Oh, you don’t know what it is to long for something that’s dead and will never come to life again! . . . And then it did come to life again, or I thought it did; and I’ve been so glad that I’ve cried at nights for joy—cried for the joy of thinking what a happy life mine would be. . . . And now you say it isn’t for me

—it's for Miss Edwards. I don't want to hate her—indeed I don't. She's both good and clever, I know, but she'll never love him as I have done—as I do yet; she can't do that—nobody can! Oh, Frank, Frank! I would rather you had killed me—killed me with your own hand this very night! . . . Oh, Frank, come back to me! I never told you how much I loved you. I'll tell you now, if you'll only come.'

For some time Lizzie talked of things like these, and then once more she grew calmer, and listened to me, and bore patiently with my efforts to comfort and soothe her. My task was not an easy one. Resignation and submission were only words to Lizzie Dent; not duties, still less feelings. She had heard of them as one hears of strange dialects of foreign languages—things not necessary to be comprehended except by the few who choose to turn aside and make special studies of them. Her heart's cry was the natural 'Spare, oh spare! give, oh give!' Renunciation, and even acquiescence, seemed like very grand, very great, but very far-off virtues, unattainable by her. She could understand what it was to bear a sorrow dumbly, unresistingly; but I felt that I was wasting words when I tried to show her her disappointment as a cross, a veritable cross, but one so luminous that, if willingly borne, it would shed light on every step of her daily path.

‘This was not mine to do, but my woman’s heart had the trick
To pour in its Gilead-balm when the iron had pierced to the
quick.’

So I tried to soothe her with words of tenderness and sympathy, to comfort her with other thoughts and other hopes, and to infuse strength by pointing out imperative duties near at hand, and not to be forgotten even now in her hour of trial.

This was the least difficult part of my efforts. Even as we walked home I saw that Lizzie was putting on, at any rate, the semblance of calmness and fortitude. ‘She would go to her own room at once,’ she said; ‘and would I tell her father and mother? and would I beg them not to mind—not to be angry with—with anyone? She would be all right in the morning; it would be churning day, and she would be too busy to think.’

So there was yet another task before me. I feared it would be a painful one, but fortunately I was to some extent mistaken in this. Esther Dent’s words came from the depths of her heart, and they were strong and bitter, but they were very few; and Isaac’s hasty, outspoken anger was not impressive. But I was glad when it was all over—when I found myself alone in my own little room. I drew back the curtain, opened the window, and, as I sat looking out over the moonlit valley, in thought I lived over the whole of

that unpeaceful day again. How I grieved for Lizzie Dent, and how I suffered with her, I can never tell. But there was comfort in the thought that she knew the worst. 'There will be no more scenes,' I said to myself; 'everything will go on as usual, and the smooth little ripples that mark the surface of daily life at Thorpe-Houe Farm will close over the wreck of Lizzie's hopes as calmly and unpityingly as the sea closes over the life-laden wreck of a stranded ship.'

CHAPTER V.

A WARNING AND AN INVITATION.

THERE are, I think, few feelings more difficult to analyze than pity. Most of us profess to know something about it; some of us talk and write as if we understood it thoroughly; but, if I mistake not, genuine pity is a much rarer article than most people imagine. If we could take away from our feelings of compassion the selfish dread of seeing and hearing of painful things, and the dislike to having our minds occupied with trains of infelicitous ideas, I fear we should often be surprised to find how little of true sympathetic sorrow for others remains behind.

I think I can say truly that my pity for Lizzie

Dent was free from selfishness during the first days of her sorrow ; but, indeed, it could hardly have been otherwise. Sad it was to see her relapsing into a state of quiet, settled hopelessness : to watch the wistful expression come over the fair little face ; the heavy, languid look, telling of tearful, sleepless nights, come into her eyes ; to hear her voice so rarely, and then to be grieved by its low, plaintful tones ; and to see her daily life again becoming a weariness and a burden to her. I had expected all this, but I did not on that account feel the less regret when I saw it.

But as the days lengthened into weeks I began to doubt the nature of my compassion a little. The depression of the social atmosphere weighed upon my spirits ; the dead beclouded calm paralyzed energy and lowered vitality ; my health began to fail again ; and I accused myself of incapacity for sympathy with monotonous suffering.

But much to my joy, I soon perceived that my distressing headaches and attacks of exhaustion were truly ' blessings in disguise ' as far as Lizzie was concerned. Poor child ! I am afraid she understood the matter a little, and felt somewhat self-reproachful. It was touching to see how she strove to put on a smiling face, to speak quietly yet cheerfully, and to move about the little parlour with a step that was active and yet noiseless. A gentle, patient, untiring

nurse she was ; and I think she would have forgotten her own sorrow altogether if she could, but it had struck too deeply for that, and I knew well that the times when she strove most earnestly to hide it were the times when the pain was keenest.

Only once or twice during those days of weakness and prostration did Lizzie allude to her grief ; and when she did so, it was with a strength and a calmness that I could not understand. Were they put on for my sake ? or were they feelings of genuine but mysterious birth, rising Phoenix-like from the ashes of dead hope and happiness ? I could not tell, but I rejoiced to see them.

One day—it was when I was getting stronger—we were sitting in the garden, in the ‘glamour of green leaves,’ under the chestnut-tree that grew by the hedge. Lizzie was working ; I was reading aloud ; the birds were chirping in the branches overhead ; the bees were humming over the flowers ; sounds from distant harvest-fields came across the valley ; and presently a short, quick step was heard coming up the path behind the hedge. It was Mr. Stainton, Squire Middleton’s steward. Coming through the little white gate, he saw us at once.

‘Good-day, ladies, good-day,’ he said, stopping, taking off his hat, and bowing as gracefully as his short stature and high stiff collar would permit.

‘ Good-day, Mr. Stainton. How is it we have not had the pleasure of seeing you sooner?’ I said, shaking hands with the dear, vain, pleasure-loving old man.

‘ Well, you see, ma’am, we have been making a many alterations on the estate this year, the Squire and me—a many alterations. And the Squire is a gentleman whose character is slightly deficient in what I may call self-reliance, ma’am—self-reliance. I shouldn’t make the same observation to anyone, but I don’t mind making it to you. Even to-day, I do assure you, it was only with difficulty that I could make my escape—with great difficulty. But I felt very desirous to do so, if possible, not having seen you before during this visit, Miss West, and wishing to see if you, Miss Lizzie, had done with a book I lent to you—a manuscript music-book. There is a fugue in it from a quartet by Mozart—rather a rare piece, I believe—and I wished to have Miss Edwards’s opinion on it.’

‘ Is Miss Edwards at the Espe House?’ Lizzie asked quietly, looking a shade paler as she spoke.

‘ Yes, Miss Lizzie; I thought you would have known. She has been there some eight or ten days now, I believe—some eight or ten days. Why do you not come down of an evening, ladies? You may be quite certain of warm welcome; and I do assure you

our little concerts are quite charming. You will not have had an opportunity of hearing Miss Edwards play, Miss West ?

‘No ; but I understand that she plays unusually well.’

‘Well ! she plays magnificently, ma’am—magnificently. I really don’t know how to describe her playing—I don’t indeed ; and, as you are aware, I am no bad judge of music—no bad judge. Half a lifetime spent in the best musical society of the city of York ; fourteen years, man and boy, a member of the Minster choir ; and having been favoured with the friendship of Dr. B——, is no bad training for a judge of music—no bad training.’

Lizzie went into the house for the book. Mr. Stainton watched her attentively as she disappeared ; and then, turning to me with something of impressiveness in his manner, he said :

‘Miss West, it doesn’t do for people in my position to interfere with other people’s affairs—to gossip, to meddle, to make mischief—it doesn’t indeed. “See all and say nothing :” that was my grandfather’s motto, and then my father’s, and now it’s mine ; and it’s a good one, too, for them that can manage it. I can manage it in a general way, not always ; I don’t want to, just now. Miss Lizzie is a favourite of mine, always has been ; and, by saying *something* instead of

nothing, I may spare her a little—a little—well, what shall I say?—a little annoyance. But, first of all, is it an impertinence on my part to ask how much longer you intend staying at Thorpe-Houe, ma'am?

'Not at all an impertinence, Mr. Stainton. I leave here three weeks to-day.'

'Thank you, Miss West, thank you; I was hoping you would be staying longer—I was hoping so for Miss Lizzie's sake. I cannot speak definitely—not at all definitely; but can you—will you try to keep my little friend out of the way of the Espe House people? I mean, can you prevent her seeing them except in your presence? I spoke inadvertently just now when I asked you to come down of an evening for the sake of the music; now I come to think of it, it would be better not to do so—much better not. They have not met lately; I am aware of that; but it may be intended that they should meet—I do not say it is, but it may be. I wish I could speak more plainly—I do indeed—but I cannot—I cannot, really. All I would like to say, I overheard the other evening—overheard it in a conversation between Miss Edwards and Miss Spencer in the orchard at the Espe House. I must not repeat it, must I?'

'It will be better not to do so; and if you are really anxious about Lizzie, perhaps I can relieve your mind a little. She has been aware of the

engagement that exists between Miss Edwards and Mr. Frank Raithwaite for some time.'

'Has she, Miss West?—has she really? I am glad of that, very glad. But there is something more that I would have said, that I will say; but don't repeat it, ma'am—don't, I beg of you! This engagement has, to a great extent, been brought about by Miss Spencer; and she is not satisfied yet—not satisfied. She suspects it will cause Miss Lizzie a little—a little annoyance, as I said before; and Miss Spencer would like to have the pleasure of seeing signs of it. There, that will be sufficient—more than sufficient. I have said too much, I am sure—far too much; and, oh dear, oh dear! what a strange old man I am. I never intended to say anything at all—never intended it for a moment.'

'You are quite safe, Mr. Stainton. I shall not betray you.'

'Thank you, ma'am, thank you; and ah, unfortunate, not another word, I'm afraid. Here's Miss Lizzie coming back with the book. Thank you, Miss Lizzie, thank you; I hope you have quite done with it?'

'Oh yes! Mr. Stainton; thank *you* for lending it to me. It's full of nice things. I only wish I had made more use of it.'

'Ah, you mustn't let your music go down; you

mustn't indeed, Miss Lizzie! Nothing clears the brain and soothes the mind like music; as Addison says,

“It wakes the soul and lifts it high,
And wings it with sublime desire.”

It is remarkable how the poets have agreed in praising the sweet “power of music,” very remarkable. From the time of the ancient ballad-writer who wrote this very verse which I have copied here on the title-page of my manuscript-book. . . . There, that is it:

“Oh, heavenly gyft, that rules the mind,
Even as the sterne doth rule the shippe!
Oh, musicke! whom the gods assinde
To comfort manne, whom cares would nippe.”

From the time of that writer down to the present day there is hardly a poet worth mentioning that has not said something worth reading on the subject of music. But I mustn't stay here quoting poetry. I have to call at the Espe House as I go through Redholm; and I must be home again before the Squire goes in to dinner; I must indeed. Good-day, ladies, good-day.'

Lizzie stood by the little white gate watching the old man till he disappeared under the trees. When she sat down again, she was pale, rigid and silent. She tried to work, but her needles broke, and the

thread was not good. The work was laid aside, a few roses that grew near pulled to pieces, and then, in a low, hesitating voice, she asked if I should like to go to the Espe House some evening ?

‘ No, Lizzie,’ I answered, ‘ I think not ; but surely *you* have no wish to go, my child ?

‘ Yes, I have, Miss West ; I should like to go very much ; only once, I should never ask to go again. Perhaps you can hardly understand me ; you don’t know what it is to be amongst them all of an evening when they are so merry. If even one isn’t quite happy one’s self, it’s nice to be amongst people who are. I went several times last autumn when Miss Edwards was staying there ; and I wasn’t always so happy then as they seemed to think I was ; but there was a sort of pleasure in being there that I can’t forget ; and I can’t describe it either : it was half a pleasure and half a pain ; and yet I was always happier there than anywhere else. The fire was brighter and the room prettier, and the music was merrier ; and there was more laughing and talking there than at any other house about here. And then there was something in their voices, in their manner, and something about all they said and did that was like—like a charm, or like a dream, or a story in a book ; it wasn’t like real life. Oh, I should like to go once again !’

‘But, Lizzie, if I were to tell you that I thought it would not be good for you to go, and to ask you to try not to think of going, should you still wish it?’

‘I’m afraid I should. I might not say anything more about it; but when I know they are all so happy all day long, and happier still in the evenings, I can’t help thinking about it, and wishing that I was happy too.’

Poor child! poor little Lizzie Dent! Sitting there with the sunlight falling through the leaves upon your yellow hair, upon your tender little face with the sweet mouth and the violet eyes; recalling bright glowing pictures that had passed away out of your sight for ever, and shrinking from all thought of the dull gray future that you imagined was spreading out before you; how hard it was for you to see the wisdom of it all! You did not know that you were learning your life lesson: the one great lesson that should be the aim—and is sure to be the end—of all human experience.

A few days later Mrs. Featherstone’s little basket-carriage stopped at the garden-gate. Mrs. Featherstone had come to see if Lizzie and I would go over to Dales-End the following week. Her two daughters had come home; they had left school altogether, and she was going to give a little party—‘an outdoor tea,

and a dance on the lawn, or something of that kind,' she said with a pleasant, comfortable smile.

Lizzie was sitting by me. She blushed a little, looked pleased, and thanked Mrs. Featherstone quite prettily. 'She should like to go very much,' she said, 'if only Miss West was strong enough.'

'I will take care of Miss West, Lizzie,' said Mrs. Featherstone; 'and I shall send Tom over with the pony-carriage for you; and if you will be very good and stay all night, I will send you back the next day.'

This was a charming arrangement, and appeared all the more charming because of the warm-hearted, natural manner in which it was made. I accepted the invitation as readily as Lizzie had done.

'And haven't you been wondering why I've never been to see you before, Miss West?' Mrs. Featherstone asked.

'No, not at all, knowing that you were at Danesborough.'

'Oh, then you did know it! I'm glad of that; I was afraid you wouldn't. Dales-End is such an out-of-the-way place, and we went so unexpectedly that I thought no one would know anything about it. . . . But I must be going: you will excuse a short visit this time, won't you? I have to go round by the mill to order some flour. Would you like to come with me for a little drive, and you too, Lizzie? I

shall be so glad if you will. You could cross that little bridge above the waterfall, and walk back by the beekside, couldn't you, or would that be too far for you, Miss West ?'

I thanked Mrs. Featherstone, and assured her that I could walk twice as far ; and just then Mrs. Dent came in. Presently Bessy followed with tea and cheese-cakes : and Mrs. Featherstone's visit was delayed considerably. It was almost an hour later when the pony-carriage was brought round to the gate.

We had a pleasant drive over the breezy hills and through the shady hollows ; so pleasant it was that I felt half sorry when we saw the red-tiled roof of the water-mill between the trees.

' Then you will expect Tom on Tuesday afternoon, will you ?' Mrs. Featherstone said as we shook hands at parting. ' I hope you will be quite well, and that we shall have fine weather. Good-bye, Miss West ; good-bye, Lizzie.'

CHAPTER VI.

MARCH EDWARDS.

THE shrill-sounding clock in the miller's cottage struck six as we crossed the little wooden bridge over the stream above the waterfall. The cottage door

was open; ducks and chickens were walking in and out with a nonchalance that was surprising. Children were playing on the green slope between the garden hedge and the stream. The miller's boy was unyoking a pair of dappled gray horses that might have served as models for Rosa Bonheur. Above the bridge, tall trees were swaying to and fro against the sky; all round the dark foliage was surging in the breeze. Sycamores overhanging the cottage roof; elms behind the stables and waggon-sheds that were clustered near the brook; oak-trees growing out of the edge of the rock over which the stream fell into the hollow below; the green branches on one side glittering with the spray thrown upward by the force, and on the other side wet with the droppings of the huge wheel that was turning slowly.

Crossing the bridge, we turned down the rocky path behind the mill, and sat for awhile on some moss-covered stones by the becksides. Just below the waterfall we were. We could see the white stream rushing down, and the foam rising against the dark-brown and green and purple rock behind. Above the roar of the fall we could hear the sounds of life from the cottage—the laughter of the children, and the clatter of the waggons and horses. The trees overhead screened us from the August sun—hot and overpowering even at this hour of the day.

The beck at our feet went eddying and rippling and flashing away, till the dark, blue-green foliage arching over it lent something of mystery to its disappearance.

Sitting there, surrounded by the scenery of the lovely glen where Thorpe-Houe mill stands, my imagination took a wide flight. I thought of hot, dusty cities; of narrow streets and tall houses; of clerks just leaving dingy counting-houses, going home (?) perhaps to dingier lodgings; of mill-hands passing in crowds from close factories, from the deafening whir and the smell and the steam of machinery, into noisy, dirty lanes and alleys; of people with toil-worn faces, and weary, drooping figures, to whom one hour's rest under the trees by that little brook would have given deeper indraughts of new thought, higher aspirations after the good and the beautiful, and stronger faith in the compensation yet to be meted out to them in large measure, than ever they find time or inspiration even to dream of in their toilsome city life.

So absorbed I was in thoughts like these that I was forgetting that I was not alone. Lizzie reminded me of the fact.

'Shall you really like going to Dales-End next week, Miss West?' she said.

'Yes, Lizzie, *really*. You will like it too, won't you?'

‘Oh yes; very much indeed. I knew that Kate and Emily Featherstone were coming home this half, and I’ve been wondering if—if we should be friends?’

‘Why? you always have been friends, haven’t you?’

‘Yes, but not intimate friends, because we haven’t seen much of each other since we were children. I’ve only met them once or twice each Christmas and midsummer. And they are younger than I am: Kate, the eldest, is only eighteen. And then, you know, Mr. Featherstone is a gentleman-farmer, not a tenant-farmer, like my father; and I was afraid the girls might—might not care to keep up the friendship now they’ve left school. I should have been quite sorry if they hadn’t: they are so nice, both of them.’

‘Tom is older than the girls, isn’t he?’

‘Oh no; he’s younger than Emily—a year younger, I believe; so he’ll only be sixteen. He has been at school near Ripon, and he’s going to Shrewsbury after Christmas. He wants to go into the army when he’s old enough.’

‘And does Mr. Featherstone approve of his wish?’

‘Yes, I think so; but—but——’

‘But what?’ I said carelessly, wondering why Lizzie hesitated to answer such a simple question.

‘Look, Miss West—look down the path!’ she said,

in a low, hurried voice; and, as I turned, I saw that her face was pale and nervous-looking, and that her lips were colourless. Her eyes were fixed on something in the distance—a group of figures coming up the road. All colour and glitter and noise they were, so it seemed to me.

‘Who are they, Lizzie?’

‘Frank Raithwaite and Miss Edwards, and Mrs. Raithwaite and Miss Spencer. That is Miss Edwards in the green silk dress and white bonnet.’

They were coming nearer, but apparently they had not yet perceived us. Lizzie recovered herself, looked eagerly round, and half rose as if to escape. ‘Sit down, Lizzie,’ I said rather sternly—‘sit down, and keep very quiet.’ The colour came back to her face more rapidly than I had wished or expected. She looked up at me wonderingly, and then bent over my hand and kissed it. I was pleased that Lizzie understood me.

The laughing and the chattering seemed quite close to us now. Suddenly they ceased: we were discovered. A minute later Mrs. Raithwaite was introducing Miss Edwards, Frank was shaking hands with Lizzie, and then they all sat down—Mrs. Raithwaite on one of the mossy stones, Miss Edwards and Miss Spencer on the sloping bank of the stream, and Mr. Frank on the stump of a tree.

This, then, was March Edwards, of whom I had heard so much—this tall, well-made, well-dressed woman who was sitting on the grass just opposite to me. I hardly know how to describe my first impressions of her. Mrs. Dent had said she was handsome. This she was not; but there was a completeness and a plenitude of health and strength about her that produced much the same effect as physical beauty. She was conscious of these advantages, and she derived ease of manner, self-possession, and an evident feeling of ascendancy from the consciousness. Her face was not a common one. Her features were large and expressive—expressive of designing power, and of will strong enough to carry out design; her eyes were gray and penetrating; her mouth was large, well-cut, and might have been pleasing but for the doubtful meaning of her smile.

‘We called at Thorpe-Houe,’ Mrs. Raithwaite began, when the formalities were over; ‘but Mrs. Dent couldn’t give us any information about you. It was fortunate that we thought of coming up here.’

‘Very fortunate indeed,’ Amelia Spencer said. ‘Not a day has passed since March came that she hasn’t talked about coming up to Thorpe-Houe. I do believe, Miss Dent, you must have fascinated her in some way when she was here last autumn.’

March Edwards darted a warning glance at the speaker, and then turned to Lizzie.

‘I hope you are stronger than you have been, Miss Dent. I am sorry to hear that your health has been so variable of late.’

‘Thank you. I am quite well now,’ Lizzie said.

The root of the tree on which Frank Raithwaite sat grew out of a rugged little hillock just above where Lizzie was sitting. He turned—apparently without intending it—as she spoke, and looked at her with eyes that were full of real tenderness. I can hardly say why or wherefore, but for a moment I half pitied him.

Again Amelia Spencer began to shoot tiny arrows poisoned with weak solutions of irony at Lizzie Dent. I was talking to Mrs. Raithwaite, and could not either hear or understand all that was passing amongst the younger people; but I heard sufficient to arouse my indignation.

At last, by dint of effort, I succeeded in making the conversation general. I asked of Miss Edwards information concerning the number of visitors at Danesborough, the music at the Pavilion, the concerts at the Spa Saloon, and the fashions on the Italian Terrace. I deferred to her opinion of the last new waltz; to Mrs. Raithwaite’s knowledge of human nature in general, and at watering-places in

particular; and to Miss Spencer's taste in dress. Lizzie began to look bright and interested. I began to feel self-satisfied.

But my satisfaction was short-lived. There was a pause in the conversation; Miss Edwards looked expressively at Amelia Spencer, and then at Frank. Amelia understood what was required of her, and broke the silence.

'Mr. Frank Raithwaite, are you aware that we have come all the way from Redholm with a special purpose?' she inquired.

'Yes, Miss Spencer, I am.'

'Then may I request you to indulge yourself with a saunter up the wood for half an hour or so?'

'I don't see the force of your request.'

'Don't you?—you'd better ask March to open your eyes.'

March Edwards smiled.

'I suppose it is the custom of the country for a gentleman to have a lady's request explained to him before he thinks proper to grant it,' she said, pulling some oak-apples from an overhanging bough as she spoke.

Frank looked somewhat perplexed at this speech, fidgeted with his new gloves for a few minutes, and then rose up to obey. Not at all sulkily he went off.

‘Being an interested party, I thought I should have been allowed to remain,’ he said, laying his hand on the top of Miss Edwards’s new white bonnet for a moment as he passed.

What was coming next? I hardly knew whether to feel amused or alarmed: for I saw that none of the party were quite at ease. Mrs. Raithwaite looked confused; Miss Edwards played with the oak-apples; Lizzie’s colour came and went rapidly; and Amelia Spencer put on a look that was altogether unintelligible. I saw, however, that she had been elected spokeswoman.

Pretending to be anxious that Frank should be fairly out of hearing, she stood in the pathway watching him till he had disappeared behind the mill; she came back with a smile on her lips, and placed herself nearer to Lizzie than she had been before.

‘I suppose,’ she began, in a low, unpleasant tone—‘I suppose it is hardly necessary to inform you, Miss Dent, that something is going to happen at the Espe House very soon—something very interesting?’

‘I don’t know of anything,’ Lizzie said.

‘Don’t you really? And you can’t guess?’

‘Yes, I think I can guess.’

Lizzie spoke very quietly; her mouth quivered a

little, and she looked rather paler than she had done ; but there was something in the expression of her face just then that calmed all my fears for her.

‘And what should you guess, Miss Dent?’ Amelia Spencer asked, in the same disagreeable voice.

‘Will it not be better for you to spare me the trouble of guessing?’

‘Oh yes—certainly, if you prefer it ; but I always think there’s such fun in carrying on a little mystery. Not that there is any real need for being mysterious in this case ; is there, March?’

‘Not any, that I am aware of.’

‘Well, then, the fact is, Miss Dent, that Frank and Miss Edwards are going to be married early in September, and we want you to be one of the bridesmaids. You can’t refuse—you can’t, indeed,’ she said, imagining, probably, that the change on Lizzie’s face betokened refusal ; ‘it’s all arranged now, and we can’t do without you. The wedding is to take place at Danesborough ; and you are to go over with me and the two Miss Houghtons the day before ; and we want you to go into Pennerby with us to choose the dresses some day next week. Now, do say you will ; only think of the fun we shall have!’

‘I should like to go, Miss Spencer,’ Lizzie said calmly, ‘but I can’t give you an answer till I’ve asked my father and mother.’

‘Can’t you, really?’

‘No, certainly not.’

‘Then when will you let us know? . . . Hadn’t we better walk down with you now, and help you to persuade them?—that is, if persuasion is necessary.’

‘Thank you, I think my mother wouldn’t like that: she will want to talk it over with father. They don’t like me to go away from home.’

‘What nonsense—what absurd nonsense! But I shall not rest till I’ve made you promise. It won’t be half the fun without you.’

Lizzie looked surprised: it was strange that she should have so suddenly become necessary to Miss Spencer’s happiness.

‘Perhaps you could give us a decisive answer on Tuesday?’ Miss Edwards said. ‘We shall meet you at Dales-End, shall we not?’

‘Yes. Are you going to Dales-End?’

‘Yes: only imagine that, Miss Dent!’ Amelia Spencer said. ‘It surprises you, doesn’t it? And the best of the joke is, that we have strong suspicions that our absence would be more desirable than our presence. But, as March says, that only adds piquancy to the thing.’

‘But they wouldn’t have asked you if they hadn’t wanted you to go.’

'*They* didn't ask us, my dear; it was Mr. Featherstone. We met him in the market-place at Pennerby on Saturday. David was with us, and Mr. Featherstone has wonderful opinions of David, and he couldn't ask him without asking the family. Mr. Featherstone is a man who would invite half the district and forget all about it the next minute, you know. Madame is not like that. Madame is a person who has "views"; wonderful views they are, some of them: and when we met her a few minutes afterwards and told her how delighted we were, it was as good as a play to see her turn crimson with vexation.'

'And how did you know that we were going?' Lizzie asked.

'How did we know it? well, we didn't know it, we only guessed it. We hinted something to Mrs. F. about staying all night, and she said she had only two spare rooms, and she was reserving them for an invalid lady and a young friend from a greater distance. Guessing was easy after that.'

Frank Raithwaite reappeared. He made no comment when Amelia Spencer complained loudly of Lizzie's obstinacy, and I fancied that a shade of depression had come over his face while he had been away. As we walked down the gill it appeared to deepen: he was silent and absent; and when we

separated, I saw, as he shook hands with Lizzie, that their eyes met for an instant, and that in his the same expression was visible that I had noticed before. Again a feeling came over me that was almost pity.

Lizzie and I were alone once more. She looked pale and weary, but she did not wish to go into the house, she said, as we went up the path to the little gate.

‘Will you go into the home meadow for a little while, Miss West?’ she continued. ‘We could sit under the hedge, and I want to talk to you, to ask you about all this—this weariness.’

‘Talk to me just as you would to an elder sister, Lizzie. I will help you if I can. I think you have been quite a brave girl to-day.’

‘Do you?’ she said, looking surprised and pleased. ‘I am glad of that. But I am afraid you would think I was wrong in wishing to go to the—to Danesborough. I have been considering it over as we walked down the gill, and I know neither father nor mother will like it, though, perhaps, they would let me go if I seemed to wish it very much; and I thought I would ask you. If you think it would be better not to go, I won’t trouble them. I’ll write a note to Miss Edwards to-morrow; so that they won’t have to say anything about it on Tuesday.’

‘I think that would be the very wisest thing you could do, Lizzie. You are going to be quite a sensible little woman.’

‘You don’t think I ought to give up Dales-End because they are going, do you?’

I hesitated a moment. When Miss Edwards had announced in the wood that they were to be of the party, I had at once made a mental resolution to dissuade Lizzie from going if possible: I reconsidered the matter now. Lizzie had shown signs of greater strength and self-control than I had given her credit for possessing. Her wish to go to Dales-End was strong and natural. Her going there would do a good deal to further her acquaintance with Mr. Featherstone’s daughters—an acquaintance that might wean her thoughts from the Espe House and its inmates more effectually than anything else would do. And the party would probably be so large that she would be able to avoid anything like a repetition of what had passed by the waterfall. I weighed these things well, placing nothing more than a vague feeling in the opposite scale; and yet the balance was so nearly equal that I could come to no decision.

‘Would it not be better to wait awhile before making up your mind, Lizzie?’ I said. ‘I can see very little reason why you shouldn’t go myself; but

perhaps when your mother knows that the Raithwaites are going, she may think that you would be as well at home.'

'Yes, it will be better to see what mother says: she always knows what's best, I think. . . . Shall we go in now, Miss West? I haven't tired you, have I?'

'No, Lizzie; not at all; but I am quite ready for my tea.'

That evening, just after I had gone upstairs, I heard a low rap at the door of my room. It was Mrs. Dent, and she looked troubled.

'You'll excuse me comin' in now, ma'am, won't you? I wanted to see you before I went to bed, to ask you what you thought o' Lizzie's goin' to this party at Dales-End. We've been talkin' about it i' t' kitchen, Isaac an' me, an' we can't agree at all. We haven't said nothin' to Lizzie yet, but Isaac knows 'at she wants to go, an' he won't hear o' my sayin' nothin' to hinder her. I can't bear to think of her goin', Miss West. I couldn't afore I knew 'at the Raithwaites would be there; an' I dread it still more now. Do tell me what you think about it, ma'am!'

'Well, I hardly know what to say, Mrs. Dent. I shouldn't like to persuade you against your will; but it seems to me that there would be very little to fear

in letting her go. I shall be there, you know; and it is not as if she were a strong-willed, independent sort of girl. She will be sure to do anything I ask her to do.'

'That's true, quite true; an' if it hadn't been for other things, I should have been the last to want to keep her at home; for I always say that she doesn't get half enough o' pleasure for a girl of her age. An' it isn't altogether on account o' the Raith-waites 'at I dread her goin'; I should hope she's both pride enough an' sense enough to know how to treat *him*. I can't tell what it is exactly—that is, I can't make other folks understand—but I've felt a kind o' fear an' tremblin' ever since Mrs. Featherstone went away, as if something was coming upon me 'at I can feel but can't see. An' mebbe you'll think it's silly, Miss West, but I've a deal o' faith in dreams—a deal o' faith I hev; an' I don't see how anybody 'at reads their Bible, an' believes it, can help thinkin' 'at dreams often has more in them than people credit nowadays. An' I've had some strange dreams lately, very strange; my poor old mother would ha' shivered to hear me tell of them. But perhaps you would rather I didn't say anything more about them now, Miss West. I don't know whether you're of a timid natur'; it isn't good for people 'at is to hear o' things like that at night.'

‘But I am not at all of a timid nature; and if your dreams trouble you, perhaps you will be able to forget them more easily when you have told them.’

‘It isn’t a great deal ’at I can tell, for most nights I’ve gone on dreamin’ strange, wild sort o’ things without either end or beginnin’; an’ that made it more remarkable when a clear dream did come; an’ I had one last week for three nights runnin’ so clear an’ nateral ’at it was just like wakin’. I seemed to know all the while ’at it was night-time—a bright moonlight night, so light ’at I could see to wash as well as if it had been mid-day. An’ I thought I was washin’ in the beck—washin’ great pieces o’ new white linen yards an’ yards long; an’ I had a clothes-basket with me, an’ when it was full I carried it up the gill, an’ spread the linen on the grass in the home-meadow. An’ then when the basket was empty I took it to the hedge-side, an’ the hedge was like a sheet o’ driven snow, with clusters o’ great white roses—such roses as I niver saw nowhere, eight or ten in a bunch, an’ growin’ all over the hedge o’ both sides as far as I could see. Then I thought I gathered some, an’ filled the basket; it was soon full, an’ I carried it back to the bottom o’ the gill, an’ emptied it into the beck, an’ I could see them clusters o’ white roses floatin’ away on the top o’ the water as plain as ever I saw anything in my life. An’ when I looked

round there was another pile o' new white linen; an' I washed that, an' laid it in the meadow, an' filled the basket with roses again, just as I'd done before: an' everything happened just the same again and again, till the meadow was white all over with the linen, as if it had been covered with one great sheet; an' the moon was shinin' on it from the top o' the field to the bottom. But it wasn't only that I saw all these things; I felt them, too. I could feel the wet linen, an' the basket-edge, an' the pricks on the roses quite plain; an' it isn't often 'at one feels things in dreams.'

'No, it isn't, Mrs. Dent,' I said; 'and your dream was somewhat peculiar. . . . And yet I cannot say that I perceive any special meaning in it.'

'Well, as far as that goes, I don't know 'at I do myself; but it left a feelin', an' feelin's is like burrs sometimes—one can't shake them off. Perhaps I shouldn't ha' minded it so much if it hadn't come three nights runnin' just the same; an' I'm afraid you'll hardly believe it, ma'am, but I do assure you 'at each mornin' when I awoke my arms ached as if with carryin' the basket. Never before have I had a dream 'at was so like wakin'.'

I tried to reason with Mrs. Dent, but it was difficult to find arguments equal in strength to her feelings of superstition; and after considerable effort I succeeded

in persuading her to try not to think any more about it that night. The next evening I learnt that Isaac's wish and Lizzie's silence had prevailed: Mrs. Dent had consented that Lizzie should go to Dales-End.

CHAPTER VII.

AT DALES-END.

It was a long drive from Thorpe-Houe to Dales-End—long and pleasant. The day was sunny and breezy; the road led over purple moors, through woody glens, by the river-side, up cultivated slopes mapped out with green hedges, and plentifully varied with trees; and finally along the upland ridge to the pleasant, well-kept farmstead.

We were not the first to arrive. Old Mr. Stainton, five or six members of the Houghton family, three odd-looking little girls from Pennerby—'the doctor's daughters,' Emily Featherstone whispered—and a few other people were already on the lawn. I went into the drawing-room to rest awhile, and from the window I saw with pleasure how warmly Lizzie was welcomed by everybody.

Then Mr. Featherstone came bustling in, all smiles and welcomes and good temper. A true type of his class he was, uniting in his character the homeliness,

the warmth of heart, the genuine hospitality of the Northern farmer with something of the education and much of the manner of a thorough gentleman. He had come in to see if I cared to go round the poultry-yard, he said, and would I go now or after tea?

‘Thank you,’ I replied; ‘I should like to go now.’

But as we stepped out through the window we found ourselves surrounded by so many people that immediate escape was impossible. Quite a large party went with Mr. Featherstone to inspect the silver-gray Dorkings and dark Brahmas, the Chittyprats and Bolton grays, for which he was so famous. Amongst others who accompanied him were Miss Edwards and Miss Spencer, Frank Raithwaite and Lizzie Dent. David had been obliged to go to Pennerby that afternoon.

Mr. Featherstone was an enthusiast on the subject of poultry-keeping; and to those who were interested he dispensed information liberally. It was amusing to hear the variety of the questions asked; but from the practical ‘Does it pay?’ to the feminine ‘Which is the prettiest?’ there was no inquiry that the owner of Dales-End failed to satisfy.

As we walked back to the lawn he continued the subject.

‘It surprises me,’ he said, ‘that the English farmer—especially the small farmer—should, as a rule, pay

so little attention to the rearing of poultry. In the north of France the holder of a small farm often looks to his poultry-yard for the greater part of his profits ; an Englishman in a similar position would laugh at the idea. And what is the consequence ? Simply this : that over three millions of English money goes into the pockets of Continental farmers every year for nothing but eggs and fowls. It is worth thinking of, if the people who could remedy it only knew how to think.'

As Mr. Featherstone concluded I turned to look for Lizzie Dent. She was helping Emily to rearrange the tea-table under the beech-tree ; very bright and very busy she was, and looking unusually well. She had taken off her hat, placed it in the branches behind, and the sun glinted through the trees, lighted up her rippling golden hair, and made the broad band of light-blue velvet seem in lovelier contrast than ever. For the rest of her toilet, perhaps it was quaint rather than pretty. Her dress was of some soft material of a light-gray or dove colour ; it was made in an old-fashioned style, and round the neck and wrists she had put some broad frillings of soft white net. There was a wonderful air of 'finish' and refinement about her ; and altogether she reminded me strongly of an old picture that I had seen not long before : a dreamy, haunting portrait of one of the beauties of a bygone day.

I was standing alone just then, half screened from the others by a group of laurels. Kate Featherstone discovered me and brought a garden-chair.

‘Will you come into the house and rest?’ she said, ‘or would you rather stay out-of-doors till tea is ready? it won’t be long.’

‘Thank you, I would rather stay here awhile; and will you please ask Lizzie to come here for a moment? I want to speak to her.’

Lizzie came tripping across the lawn, all smiles and radiance; but when she came near to me I saw that she was getting excited. I dreaded this—without even acknowledging it to myself, I dreaded it more than anything. But I did not at first make any remark about it.

‘Lizzie,’ I said, ‘you are going to have tea out-of-doors, are you not?’

‘Yes, Miss West; all the young people are. You don’t mind it, do you?’

‘I don’t know, Lizzie; when I am indoors and you are outside amongst those people you were with just now, I feel as I imagine a hen must feel when she sees her duckling on the water.’

Lizzie smiled, knelt down on the grass beside me, and looked up with such a beseeching expression in her dark, violet eyes that I knew a plea was coming.

‘Miss West, don’t ask me to go indoors to tea—

please don't,' she said. 'I know exactly what you are thinking about: you are afraid they will persuade me to go to the wedding after all, are you not? but you needn't have any fear of that; they are offended because of the note I sent; and they have scarcely spoken to me this afternoon. Miss Spencer is the most offended; I don't think Miss Edwards minds it so much; at any rate, she is pleasanter; and Frank is just the same—no, not quite. . . . Oh! Miss West, Miss West, don't blame me—don't despise me; but Frank Raithwaite loves me yet. I know he does: I can see it, and feel it. It is in his eyes every time he looks at me; and he turns away and begins to talk and laugh with March Edwards as if he wanted to forget me. And he can't—he can't: he will never do that—never.'

'Lizzie! do you know that this man of whom you are speaking is to be married to another woman in less than a month from to-day?'

'Do I know it? yes, only too well: it's that makes the bitterness of it. But it will soon be over—very soon. Miss Edwards goes back to Danesborough on Saturday; and Frank is going away the same day—going to Gratton to engage a house—they are going to live at Gratton, you know—and I don't think he will come back any more before the wedding. Oh, don't ask me to have tea in the dining-room, please.'

It's only for to-day—I shall never feel like this again. And I will promise you to keep away from them as much as I can; I don't want to talk to them, only to see them. I am going to sit by Emily Featherstone at tea; and I will come to you afterwards. Please say that I needn't go in, Miss West.'

'I could have said so without hesitation if you had been the same quiet, brave little woman you were in the gill the other day.'

'Could you? well, I will try to be quieter; but if I were not laughing and talking I should be thinking, and people would fancy I was ill.'

'I don't want you not to laugh and talk, Lizzie; by no means; but there are two ways of doing a thing, you know.'

'Yes, yes, I know what you mean; and I will try to be good, to be as quiet as I was the other day. . . . But, Miss West, if you really wish it I will go in with you now. Here's Kate Featherstone coming to tell us that tea is ready.'

'You shall have your own way, my child; only mind you keep your promise, and come to me when tea is over.'

The table under the beech-tree was near to the house—so near that the sounds of mirth and enjoyment were heard through the open windows of the dining-room quite distinctly. We indoor people were

a quieter and a smaller party; indeed, so few we were in number that the profusion of Mrs. Featherstone's 'tea'-table seemed almost absurd. But explanations followed in course of time. Mrs. Featherstone had intended the outdoor tea only for the younger ones, and when she found that nearly all her guests preferred the beech-tree to the dining-room, fresh arrangements had to be made—arrangements that seemed to cause a good deal of confusion and not a little amusement. Plates for cold chicken and ham were presented at one of the open windows by Emily; Tom bounced in through another for pigeon-pie and salad; and Kate, in more decorous manner, came round by the door for fresh supplies of jam-tarts and cheesecakes, puffs and plum-cakes; and Mr. Featherstone himself disappeared with full hands more than once. The two stout, rosy-cheeked, left-handed-looking maidservants appeared to have very little idea that anything more was required of them than hearty appreciation of the small jokes that were circulating between the parties.

I think Mrs. Featherstone felt not a little relief when tea was fairly over. The tables were cleared quickly, the piano placed close by the drawing-room window, Mr. Stainton's violin-case and music-book produced from the corner by the hall-clock, and preparations for a country dance were made. Lizzie

kept her promise. She came to me, looking quieter and sadder, and after standing by the window a few minutes, she went away in a listless manner to dance with George Houghton. Then Kate Featherstone and I had a little struggle for the music-stool: Kate was defeated, and opened the dance with Mr. Frank Raithwaite.

It was a pleasant scene—the sunlight and the trees, the broad lawn and the flowers, the happy faces and the bright ribbons, the music and the dancing; Emily Featherstone, with her blonde curls and dress of light blue grenadine, ‘skipping down the middle, and up again, as wild as a March hare,’ to use her father’s comparison; Miss Edwards, in her handsome silk dress and lace shawl, sailing across the lawn in her stateliest manner, and giving only the tip of her lavender kid glove to the bewildered-looking young lawyer from Pennerby, who was her partner in the dance; the doctor’s little girls, in white muslin and rose-coloured sashes, rushing incoherently hither and thither; Tom Featherstone ‘crossing hands’ with a warm-looking lady in maroon-coloured satin; Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone sitting with the few people who were not dancing in a shady corner of the lawn; little Mr. Stainton standing close to the drawing-room window, half hidden by the rose-bushes, and completely absorbed in his violin. Never before or

since have I met with such an accompanist: his precision was something to remember.

Till the end of the fourth dance I kept my place at the piano, and then gave it up to Kate. As I was crossing the lawn two unexpected visitors made their appearance—Archie Middleton, the Squire's son, a youth about seventeen, and a young man named Mr. Davis, who was reading with Dr. Farnworth. They had heard the music as they rode along the top of the wood, they said, and feeling certain of welcome, they had ventured down.

Mr. Featherstone's hearty greeting soon assured them that they had not acted under mistaken views of his hospitality, and before many minutes had passed they were provided with partners, and were keeping good time to Kate's inspiriting waltz. The waltz was followed by a quadrille. Lizzie did not dance this time: she sat by me on the edge of the lawn, watching the others. A strange look was on the child's face—a drawn, white, eerie look that was sad to see.

'You don't intend to dance again, Lizzie?' I said inquiringly, after a long silence.

'Only the last dance, Miss West. I have promised that—promised it to Frank Raithwaite.'

There was a determinate tone in her voice that prevented me from making any effort to induce her to

break her promise. She sat silent—almost motionless. The music and the dancing, the laughing and the flirting, went on. The quadrille came to an end, another was formed. Archie Middleton crossed the lawn and asked Lizzie to dance, then George Houghton came, and after him Mr. Davis, the tall student; but Lizzie was too tired to dance any more just then. She was going to take a long rest, she said wearily.

The twilight shadows began to fall; a purple haze rolled up the river, hiding the trees on the other side of the dale; soft little winds swept over the lawn; bats began to wheel about overhead; the outlines of the figures before us grew dim and indistinct; one or two guests from a distance began to talk of departure; the doctor's carriage drove up to the gate for the three little girls; supper was announced—nobody regarded the announcement; March Edwards took Kate's place at the piano; Mr. Stainton shouted 'Sir Roger de Coverley' in his loudest voice; Frank Raithwaite came up in search of Lizzie; they went across the lawn together; the last dance began, and, in the semi-darkness and confusion, I lost sight of them altogether.

Soon afterwards I went indoors: the others came in by twos and threes, making the supper almost as interminable an affair as the dance. I waited long and anxiously for Lizzie to come in, but I waited in

vain. Frank Raithwaite, Miss Edwards, and Miss Spencer appeared, and took their places at the table in high spirits; a few of the guests who had come in earlier said 'good-bye' all round and went away; and then Kate Featherstone and I went into the drawing-room. To my surprise, we found Lizzie there alone. She was sitting pale and quiet in a low chair by the table.

'Won't you go in and have some supper, Lizzie?' Kate said.

'No, thank you, Kate; I don't want any. Have all the people gone?'

'Not quite all: Archie Middleton and Mr. Davis are coming in here, I believe; and perhaps Mr. Stainton and the Raithwaites too. They asked if they might stay for a little music.'

Almost before Kate had done speaking the door opened, and Mr. Featherstone, Mr. Stainton, and the two young strangers came in. Presently Miss Edwards, Miss Spencer, Mrs. Featherstone, and Emily followed; last of all came Frank Raithwaite and Tom. We were quite a large party.

Lizzie came round to the sofa and sat by me. The piano was put back into its proper place, Mr. Stainton's violin tuned afresh, and then the 'concord of sweet sounds' began. This was to me the most enjoyable part of the evening, and I enjoyed it

thoroughly; for it had not often fallen to my lot to hear such 'drawing-room music' as I heard in that farmhouse in the Yorkshire dales.

Mr. Stainton had spoken truly when he said that Miss Edwards's playing was difficult to describe; it would indeed be difficult to find words to express the strength and variety of the emotions that she seemed to inspire at will. A subdued, spellbound, or half-amazed expression was visible on the face of almost every listener in the room.

Some songs and glees followed; Kate and Mr. Davis sang a duet; and then Lizzie was asked to play. She excused herself; she was tired, she said; and again March Edwards sat down to the piano. She played a sonata by Mozart, and then one or two of the saddest and sweetest of Mendelssohn's 'Lieder ohne Wörter.' I missed something from the playing of these.

Mr. Stainton came round to the sofa.

'So you are like Jessica, Miss Lizzie?' he said, with a smile on his kindly old face.

'Jessica?' said Lizzie inquiringly.

'Yes; you remember Jessica in the "Merchant of Venice." Judging from your looks, I am sure you might say with her, "I am never merry when I hear sweet music;" and I might reply with Lorenzo, "The reason is, your spirits are attentive."' '

Lizzie smiled, somewhat drearily. I think she scarcely comprehended the old man.

Soon afterwards the clock in the hall struck the hour of midnight. Of course everybody was astonished; nobody had any idea it was so late; music was such an entrancing thing. Why hadn't somebody reminded them of the time? Ten minutes more were spent in apologies, preparations, and leave-takings; and at least another half-hour passed before Lizzie and I found ourselves alone in the pretty, comfortable rooms that we were to occupy.

The house was an old-fashioned one; the ceilings low, the windows small and numerous, and the rooms one within another. Lizzie's room was beyond mine; and long after we had said 'Good-night' to each other I could hear her walking slowly up and down. Then she paused and rapped gently at the door.

'May I come in?' she said in a low voice.

'Yes, come here and sit by the window: sit quietly till I have done reading. I shall not be long.'

'May I look over your book?' she said presently.

'Yes, Lizzie.'

We read in silence for some minutes.

* * * * *

As I closed the book I saw that the strange expression which I had remarked on Lizzie's face before had deepened. It seemed as if it were the expression

of some thought or feeling of which she was only partially conscious ; and she looked up at me with a questioning, bewildered glance, as if she would have asked me to help her to make out the hidden meaning of the ordeal through which she was passing, or had passed. Then she smiled—a sad smile it was—and she put out her hand to me with that languid, touching gesture which people in extreme bodily pain often use, craving for the indescribable comfort which is found in a loving, soothing, friendly touch.

I sat with Lizzie's hand in mine some time, wondering how far I really understood what was passing in her mind. Lizzie was young. There is a strength and a beauty in the happiness of youth, and a keenness and a hopelessness in its sorrow, that one loses the power to realize to their fullest extent as one grows older. I felt that I did not lack sympathy ; but sympathy is not participation, and I knew that if I could not enter into her grief she might turn to me for help in vain.

Then I remembered that all true sorrows, however diverse in nature and degree, have much in common. The sorrows of youth, of maturity, of age, of mind, body, or estate—they come from the same loving Hand, they have the same purpose and meaning, and there is but one and the same Refuge from all. Thinking of these things, my difficulties vanished.

‘Lizzie, my child,’ I said, ‘I am glad that this day is over.’

‘I am glad, too, Miss West; it has been such a strange day. I have been trying to think what I had done that so much trouble should come upon me.’

‘You do not think that trouble is only sent as punishment for sin, do you, Lizzie?’

‘Yes, I do. I have always thought so.’

‘But that is taking the very lowest view of it, my child. Sorrow has far higher meanings than that.’

‘Has it, Miss West? Will you tell me about it? Will you talk to me as you did that evening in the home meadow? I want to know—to learn what it all means. I have been wrong to-day—very wrong; but I could not fight against my thoughts when he was there. I want to forget it all now if I can. I shall always love him, but I don’t want to think about him any more. . . . Oh, Miss West! I never thought that heartache was a real pain—that one could feel it here, just as one feels pain of any other kind.’

Lizzie spoke quietly, but her pale lips quivered, and tears trembled in her eyes and in her voice.

With the gentlest touch I could command, I tried to soothe away the remembrance of the cause of her grief, and to explain to her its use, and what might be its effect, how it might strengthen, purify, influence

her whole future life. She listened eagerly while I spoke, and the questioning look died away, and left calmness on her face.

The night was passing on, but my work was yet unfinished.

Something I had found to do—something so high, so holy, that, remembering my own unworthiness, I shrank from the effort. ‘Who am I that I should dare attempt such things as these?’ I asked of myself.

But, with a strength that was not my own, I spoke again—spoke of One whose love and sympathy—if Lizzie could only once truly feel them—would soothe her aching heart, and satisfy its every need with a fulness, and a readiness, and a tenderness beyond the power of words to describe. The task was not at first an easy one. Lizzie had no doubts. From her childhood she had heard and read of Him who was crucified eighteen hundred years ago; and she believed in Him—believed that He had chosen a suffering life to teach her how to live, and had died a cruel death that she might never die. All this was comprehended in her pure and simple faith; but

‘A Jesus with the pulse of human life,
The throbs of human feeling. . . .
. the living Christ,
The youth, the man, all tempted, struggling, worn’—

Him she had never seen. To tell her how and where she might find Him was what I strove to do.

The time passed unheeded as we talked of the Man of Sorrows who bore our griefs, lived our life, and shared our nature. The face of the child at my knee was enrapt with wonder as I spoke of His human love, and the pain, the anguish, that must have come over His human soul when that love was made to add to the concentration of suffering that He endured. Then I read to her some parts of the history of those sufferings; and of some of the circumstances that preceded them. Of how there was one amongst His little band of friends whom He loved with a special love: thus seeming to sanctify for ever the natural feeling of preference, which is so strong, and adds so much to the joy and sorrow of human life. We spoke long and reverently of the sacred friendship between Jesus and the disciple whom He loved, and who leaned on his Master's breast at that Last Supper. Full of comfort was the subject to me as well as to Lizzie Dent.

Then I turned to some of the events that happened later on that Thursday evening so long ago; and as I read, the gulf of years seemed narrowed to a span. It was no longer the dead, far-off Christ of whom we thought and spoke; it was the living, suffering, betrayed, forsaken Friend.

Thinking of some of His sufferings, endeavouring partially to realize the awful weight of His anguish, mental and bodily, and remembering that to these was added prevision of every pang that He was to suffer between that hour and the hour wherein His last cry went up from the cross, it seemed as if the saddest words that ever were written or uttered in human language were the words that were written of His closest friends: '*And they all forsook Him, and fled.*'

One betrayed Him, one denied Him, *all* forsook Him.

Who amongst us, remembering this, shall dare to complain of the coldness or the transitoriness, the insufficiency or the faithlessness of human affection?

When Lizzie Dent rose up to go to her own room there was a look of peace on her face. She went away silently. I remained sitting by the window for some time, and then went to bed.

Gloriously the sun rose over the highland ridge behind Dales-End, tinting the broad masses of foliage with high lights of golden green, shimmering on the surface of the river, sparkling on the latticed window-panes of the little church on the opposite side of the dale, and lighting up the distance of the wide-spread landscape with a strong clear light that

brought out every object with wonderful distinctness. A soft little breeze swept the cool morning air through the room; a shower of petals from the Gloire de Dijon that grew as high as the window-sill came in at the same time. The air was musical with the matin-songs of the birds that trilled and warbled from almost every bough. Beauty and sweetness, light and sunshine, was on every side.

It was a morning on which to be glad—on which to feel that every chord of one's heart's music was ready to respond in strains of joy and harmony. I was surprised, disappointed, to find that all within me was silent and subdued.

I was not sad nor downcast, but a feeling of solemn reverence was upon me for which I could not account. The typical glory of the visible world was dimmed by shadows from the Invisible. A sense of the nearness of 'the things which are not seen' grew strong within me—'dim, inexplicable sympathies' stirred my spirit. A quickened pulse, an irregularly-beating heart, told me that I was 'afraid where no fear was.'

I sat down to wrestle with these unwelcome feelings; but, like Rosalind's affections, 'they took the part of a better wrestler than myself.'

I tried to throw the blame on the natural weakness of my woman's nature; but I was reminded that

strong and wise men had given evidence of acquaintance with forebodings of ill. Could Milton have written as he did of the presentiment of evil that caused Adam's heart to beat in 'falt'ring measure' while he waited for the return of Eve if he (the writer) had never felt anything analogous to it? or could Hume have written the explanatory note on the same passage with such evident acquiescence in the sentiment if *his* heart had invariably 'kept true time'? These were difficult questions to answer satisfactorily.

Sounds of life broke the silence. I sat down by the little window at the further end of my room and tried to interest myself in the farmyard. A long line of golden corn-stacks were ranged just within the high wall, and were half covered with the doves and pigeons that were pluming themselves in the morning sun. A pair of huge red waggons, with gorgeously-painted vignettes of farm-life on the panels, were standing in the sheds. Dick was driving the cows up from the pasture to be milked. A stout dairy-maid in a linsey-woolsey petticoat, a short blue-cotton jacket, and a broad-frilled white cap, was crossing the yard with a pair of glittering milk-pails. Then I saw Emily Featherstone, with a basket on her arm, going down by the holly-hedge to the poultry-yard. I thought I should like to go too.

Before leaving my room I stood listening for a moment, wondering whether Lizzie was stirring. All was silent. I would not wake her, I thought; she was sure to be very tired.

Not a little was Emily Featherstone surprised when I joined her in the poultry-yard. She was a bright, merry girl, full of fun and mischief, and she laughed and chatted unceasingly. Surely, I thought, the companionship of such a cheery little sprite as this must drive away these haunting shadows. But it seemed they were not to be driven away easily. When I went back to my room the inward 'hush' was as deep as ever.

It wanted still an hour to breakfast-time. I thought I should like to try a short breezy walk along the upland ridge at the back of the house. Yes, that would be the best thing, undoubtedly; and perhaps Lizzie would like to go too; she must be awake by this time.

Again I listened at the door of her room. I could hear no sound. How strange it was that she should not be stirring! she was always such a very early riser when she was at home. Then I rapped gently at the door; no answer came.

I cannot analyze or describe the sensations that came over me during the few moments that I stood hesitating as to whether I should go into Lizzie's

room unbidden. Sufficient to say that I felt utterly powerless to turn away unsatisfied.

At last, obedient to a sudden impulse, I opened the door.

Lizzie's room was smaller than mine, and there was only one window in it—a low window, with a broad seat, shaded by curtains of white muslin. Lizzie was sitting on the window-seat, her hands lightly crossed on her dove-coloured dress, her head leaning in a wearied position against the thick side-wall; the white curtain drooping partly over her face, the sunbeams glittering amongst the loose wavelets of her golden hair, which had escaped from the band of light-blue velvet. The casement window was open. A white rose was waving to and fro in the morning breeze.

I crossed the little room reverently. At that moment I knew not whence came the strength and the calmness that stole over me as I drew the muslin curtain aside, and looked on the sweet, dead face of Lizzie Dent. The white-robed Azrael had passed me by very closely during the night I spent at Dales-End.

THE END.

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